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Chapter VI
Beyond Localization:
A New Look at Disseminating Information via the Web

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ABSTRACT

Localization of a document requires tacit knowledge of the target language and culture. Although it is promoted by many software developers and Web designers, localization is becoming increasingly inadequate as a strategy for disseminating information via the World Wide Web. The 21st century has already seen dramatic rises in the numbers of Internet users in nearly every country, making it difficult, if not impossible, for any translation effort to accommodate all of the 347 languages that claim at least 1 million speakers. The best way to expand the accessibility of Web content is to make it more explicit, not more tacit. This means producing and uploading clear English content that nonnative speakers can easily understand. Global English is written with simpler sentence structure, less jargon, and no slang—characteristics that make it a viable lingua franca for countless Web users whose native language is not considered important enough to merit a localization effort.

INTRODUCTION

The implementation of information technology (IT) worldwide has made huge strides in the first years of the 21st century. One milestone is that the number of people who access the Internet surpassed 1 billion by the end of 2005. As the development of IT impacts more of humanity, there is an increasing need for the development of human infrastructure, especially the ability to express oneself clearly to audiences who do not share one's cultural background.

During the past decade or two, the conventional wisdom has been that teams of translators should be summoned to render user guides, help files, Web pages, and other documents into selected

languages. Ideally, content should not only be translated, but also attuned to tacit aspects of the target language that reflect the local culture of the end users. In other words, the document should be localized.

Although localization is still essential in marketing, the author challenges the assumption that all Web documents "need" to be localized in order to maximize global availability. As more and more people come online in countries that speak "minor" languages, the task of disseminating information in translated form becomes increasingly complex. One must either continually add new languages to the company repertoire, or else abandon increasingly large segments of the world's population who are not native speakers of any of the languages chosen for localization efforts.

The author does not propose that localization efforts should be relinquished; rather, the paradigm for maximizing global access to a Web site needs to be shifted. The first step is to recognize localization's declining ability to cover a Web that is populated by increasing numbers of speakers of ever more diverse languages. After we see the limits of localization as a 21st century strategy, we can take a fresh look at alternatives. The author believes that a comprehensive approach to disseminating information globally must include English-language content that is accessible to a wide range of user fluency.

This chapter explains why and how English should be written more clearly so that it can function better as a global language, not only between native and nonnative speakers but also between nonnative speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds. The explanation extends into a discussion of how to improve Web page design by considering infrastructure logistics and cultural preferences, which impact decisions about content because they are facets of the larger question of global access. The chapter aims to show how *Global English* can facilitate the sharing of knowledge via the World Wide Web, enabling the medium to benefit more of humanity.

BACKGROUND CONCEPTS

When a child learns to tie shoelaces, or another routine task that we adults take for granted, he or she acquires a skill that is rarely, if ever, learned through words, images, or a combination of both. Such *tacit knowledge* is contrasted with *explicit knowledge* (Nonaka & Takeuchi, 1995, p. 8), *focal knowledge* (Sveiby, 1997), *codified knowledge* (Stiglitz, 1999, p. 11), or *formal knowledge* (Jarboe, 2001, p. 2). All four expressions of this fundamental dichotomy in human knowing derive from the theories of Polanyi (1962, 1966).

Tacit knowledge can be defined as knowledge that is demonstrated but not explained; it is absorbed rather than grasped. It is often acquired through learning by doing which, as Jarboe (2001) notes, is facilitated by the "web of relationships and connections" that constitutes social capital (p. 3). Such learning involves imitating other people—not only family, friends, and coworkers, but also strangers within one's community. An example would be people in a mall reinforcing a child's ability to get on an escalator without hesitating. Learning by doing also happens without guidance, which is how most video games and computer simulations are played.

In *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, Chomsky (1969) tells how native speakers tacitly understand their own language in ways that they often cannot explain:

Obviously, every speaker of a language has mastered and internalized a generative grammar that expresses his knowledge of his language. This is not to say that he is aware of the rules of the grammar or even that he can become aware of them, or that his statements about his intuitive knowledge of the language are necessarily accurate. Any interesting generative grammar will be dealing, for the most part, with mental processes that are far beyond the level of actual or even potential consciousness; furthermore, it is quite apparent that a speaker's reports and viewpoints about his behavior and his competence may be in error. Thus a generative