# Chapter VIII
# How to Globalize Online Course Content

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## ABSTRACT

Considering that 347 languages have over 1 million speakers each and account for 94% of the world's population, localization is unsustainable as a strategy for making online courses globally accessible. Writing Web content in Global English is the best way to ensure that people from all linguistic backgrounds have a reasonable chance of comprehending course materials. This chapter shows how to transform native English text into Global English (simpler syntax, less jargon, fewer idioms, no slang). It also discusses e-learning design issues such as cultural perspective and Internet logistics (speed and cost of connection). Finally, it addresses the future of English as a global language, particularly in reference to its supposed "rivalry" with Mandarin.

## INTRODUCTION

Consider the following two approaches to discussing the use of English online.

During the occasion of preparing for the production of teaching materials to be used for e-learning, one should not neglect giving serious thought to reflecting upon the choice of language to be used for writing the e-learning content. Since English has not unequivocally become a global language, it is difficult, if not impossible, to deny its suitability as the source language for such a project. The evidence for it will be presented during the course of this chapter as follows.

Get with the program, dude! Keep it simple, stupid. Word: English is the language of choice. It's what works, but be cool about it.

Clearly, neither of the preceding paragraphs is an example of using English as a global language. The first is too stilted. Its opening sentence tor-

ments the reader with a series of phrases that hesitate to state the point: during the occasion, preparing for, production of, to be used. The first paragraph also has double negatives (not neglect and not unequivocally), an ordinary word that is ambiguous regarding its part of speech (since), and a useless phrase that repeats an obvious point (as follows). On the other hand, the second paragraph is too sketchy and overloaded with slang.

Let's start again:

Before producing e-learning materials for a global audience, consider the language in which the content will be written. Among the major languages of the world, English is the closest to being a global language. Writing your text in clear English is the best way to reach a worldwide audience, as I will explain in this chapter.

This situation naturally is an advantage for any e-learning provider who is a native speaker of English, or at least can employ native speakers to write the home page and other key parts of the Web site. However, the English normally spoken by Americans, Canadians, British, Australians, New Zealanders, Singaporeans, Indians, Jamaicans, and others is not itself a global language. Each of these countries speaks and writes its own dialect, full of local idioms and slang: American English, Queen's English, and so forth.

In order to serve a worldwide audience (as in World Wide Web), it is necessary to use Global English—English which is written in such a way that it can easily be understood by non-native speakers, as well as native speakers from diverse parts of the planet. This chapter teaches you how to recognize and write Global English.

## THE CASE FOR GLOBAL ENGLISH

Nowadays, most Web sites that aim for multinational markets will localize their content by translating it into languages spoken by major groups of Internet users: Spanish, Chinese, Russian, and so on. In August 2003, the software developer, Jordi Mas i Hernàndez (2003) tallied the presence of various languages on the Web by inputting keywords specific to each language. He found that English was the dominant language of the text on 1,280 million pages, followed by German (182 million), French (100 million), and then a cluster of four languages in the 65-70 million range: Japanese, Spanish, Chinese, and Korean.

Some people interpret his results as a call for increasing the localization of Web pages into languages other than English. Unfortunately, localization can never succeed in reaching a worldwide audience because, by definition, its purpose is to serve specific groups of users. Adding up a handful of local or regional groups does not equal a global audience.

There are presently 6,912 living languages, including 347 that have over 1 million speakers each (Gordon, 2005). Nobody will localize a Web site into all of them. How often do you see sites that offer the option of viewing pages in Bengali, Gujarati, Marathi, Punjabi, Telugu, Thai, Turkish, or Wu, each of which has over 40 million speakers?

The usual explanation for excluding these languages is that they are spoken in countries which currently have low Internet penetration. This justification reveals that localization is a short-term strategy, one which will become increasingly difficult to implement as time goes on. The number of Internet users more than doubled worldwide from 361 million in 2000 to 958 million in 2005, with doubling or tripling on every continent and in nearly all countries that began the 21st century with low percentages of users (Internet World Stats, 2005).

In poor countries, many people (especially youths) who lack a computer at home access the Internet via cyber cafes. This sharing of hardware is analogous to the pass-around readership of a newspaper, or people reading a book in a library instead of buying it. Statistics about total Internet users in such countries are often based on multiplying the number of Internet service provider

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