



## **Chapter X**

# **E-Learning Localized: The Case of the OOPS Project**

Meng-Fen (Grace) Lin  
University of Houston, USA

Mimi Miyoung Lee  
University of Houston, USA

## **Abstract**

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*The power of Internet provides unprecedented opportunities for learners to obtain diverse content and for educators to quickly distribute resources. In the increasing globalized learning environment, OpenCourseWare (OCW) is one of the recent movements to utilize the Internet in making educational materials freely available to the world. However, the fact that these materials are offered mainly in English poses challenges to the non-English speaking population in many parts of the world. In response to such concern in the Great China Region, a localization project called the Opensource OpenCourseWare Prototype System (OOPS) was born in Taiwan in February, 2004 (Lin & Chu, 2005). OOPS aims to break the language barrier and deliver the openly-accessible English educational materials to the Chinese-speaking audience in their native language. This chapter presents the detailed background and history of this project, and highlights three challenges that OOPS has faced in its early stage of development. They are: (1) access to materials, (2) issues about translation, and (3) complexity of intra-cultural communication. Based on the first author's direct experience with the project, suggestions and implications for future research are also offered.*

## Introduction

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One of the modern marvels is the invention of the Internet. The Internet is believed to have provided the vehicle for information exchanges beyond geographical boundaries. The widespread availability and use of the Internet and the growing number of its users worldwide have brought our offline behaviors and routines into the online dimension. The demographics of Internet users shifted over the years from the middle-class male white dominance of the early years to greater numbers of minority population, including females and people with modest income in America (Pew, 2005). Other countries such as Taiwan also have experienced similar changes. According to a 2004 Taiwanese Internet user survey, there were more female users (59%) than males (41%) online. The same survey also showed a small increase of users in the age group between 35 and 44-year-olds, compared to the previous year (Yam.com, 2005). A similar survey in China indicated that the male to female user ratio was 60.6% to 39.4%, with almost 60% of the users under the age of 30 (China Internet Network Information Center, 2005). Nevertheless, both surveys pointed out that the majority of Internet users in Taiwan and China had the educational level beyond the post-secondary degree.

Consistent with the American Internet usage pattern, the two surveys in Taiwan and China indicated that checking email and browsing the Internet were the two major activities for going online. Blurring the boundaries between work and leisure, formal and informal learning, the advancement of the Internet has made it possible for many of us to obtain information from remote sources and experience it more flexibly. It appears, however, that language still poses as one of the more significant barriers for knowledge sharing in this age of globalized e-learning. Even though the Internet has been regarded as the vehicle bringing the world to our fingertips, surveys on the users in China reveal otherwise. For example, only 9.3% of China's Internet users visit English language Web sites (China Internet Network Information Center, 2005). In a different survey, when asked what language-based Web sites they most frequently visit in addition to those in Chinese, 33% of Taiwan's Internet users indicated that they did not visit any other language-based Web sites (Yam.com, 2005). Considering the fact that English is the most widely-used language in the cyberworld, the above statistics shows that language still "remains a significant barrier discouraging users from venturing out farther into the cyberworld" (Liu, Day, Sun, & Wang, 2002) for the non-English population. In response to such concerns, the OpenSource OpenCourseWare Prototype System (OOPS) establishes a bottom-up movement to help learners break the language barrier and bring more openly-shared knowledge sources to the Great China Region. OOPS was set up with the goal of translating an array of online education materials made available to the public through the OpenCourseWare (OCW) initiative into Chinese.

Before introducing OOPS in more detail, the authors will explain the background of the OpenCourseWare movement in the next section.

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