



Chapter IX

A Case Study: Creating and Designing a Bilingual Resource Web Site for Somali Immigrants

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Abstract

This chapter addresses the design and procedural variables of creating a bilingual Web site information portal for an audience of culturally diverse immigrants. A Web site developed as a resource for a diverse Somali community (<http://www.somaliresource.net>) is used as a case study for this chapter. The Somali community, which includes immigrants, refugees, and asylees, faces difficulties associated with language barriers. They struggle with the adjustment of life in a completely new system in Minnesota. The aim of this resource is to address some of the Somali's informational needs in the form of a one-stop bilingual Web site. It is our goal to describe our design process, and offer recommendations on design and procedural variables for working with the Somali cultural group. We envision that graphic designers and other researchers will find it useful to reference this material when they address design issues related to different cultural groups.

Introduction

For the past 15 years, the state of Minnesota, in the United States, has received one of the largest waves of Somali immigrants in North America. Most of these immigrants are located in and around the Minneapolis/St. Paul metro area. The majority of these individuals have come to the United States as refugees fleeing political unrest in their homeland.

The 2000 U.S. Census (U.S. Census Bureau, 2000) estimated the number of Somalis in Minnesota to be approximately 15,000. However, less conservative figures reach as high as 50,000 (Burke, 2001).

According to the Minneapolis Foundation (2004), many immigrants arrived in other U.S. states before relocating permanently to Minnesota. The primary reason for this relocation is that an established Somali community, as exists in Minnesota, is better prepared to address the particular needs of Somalis, including the need for unskilled jobs that do not require English fluency or literacy.

These new immigrants experience many difficulties adjusting to their lives in a new country. They face language barriers, culture shock, religious differences, and a sense of loss and isolation. Additionally, many of them must cope with traumatic experiences that they survived in war-torn Somalia or refugee camps. There are few resources readily accessible to facilitate a smooth transition to their new environment.

The objectives of this bilingual Web site project were to create an online community resource for the Somali immigrants, especially in Minnesota, and to examine the design and procedural variables of creating a bilingual Web site for this population.

The Collapse of Somalia

Somalia, a former British and Italian colony, became an independent nation in 1960. By 1969, General Siad Barre overthrew Somalia's nascent democratic institutions; he maintained political and military power for the next 20 years. His repressive regime centralized all of the economic activities in Mogadishu, Somalia's capital, while ignoring the rest of the country. This imbalance gave rise to tensions in Somalia's regions for the control and distribution of increasingly scarce resources, and to the creation of militias accountable to faction leaders.

In 1991, Barre was overthrown, but the opposing factions failed to agree on a replacement. This plunged the country into lawlessness and clan warfare, which was exacerbated by the large arms remnants from the Cold War. In the early 1990s,

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