4 Trends in Writing for Translation
   M. Katherine Brown
10 Technical Writers Comment
   Jerry Luther
14 Writing and Translation as Parallel Processes
   Debra Kramasz
19 Controlled English for Global Business
   John M. Smart
22 Avoiding a US-centric Writing Style
   Laurie Kamerer
Localization is the language of international business.

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Research: Jerry Luther, David Shadbolt
News: Kendra Gray, Becky Bennett
Illustrator: Doug Jones
Production: Sandy Compton
Photographer: Brent Rosengrant

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Advertising: advertising@multilingual.com
www.multilingual.com/advertising
208-263-8178

Subscriptions, customer service, back issues:
subscriptions@multilingual.com
www.multilingual.com/subscribe
208-263-8178

Submissions: editor@multilingual.com
Editorial guidelines are available at
www.multilingual.com/editorialWriter
Reprints: reprints@multilingual.com
208-263-8178

This guide is published as a supplement to MultiLingual Computing & Technology, the magazine about language technology, localization, Web globalization and international software development.
Writing for Translation

Technical writers and translators have much in common. They take “raw material”—specifications, instructions, a product on one hand; a completed document or text on the other—and transform it into documents ready for end users. Ideally, each specialist’s work complements the other’s to enhance the value and usability of the product. But each must consider the role of the other in order for the process to work well. Writing for translation requires the technical writer to express complex concepts in terms clear enough to move easily from one language to another. And growing numbers of translators see their role in terms of writing, not just transcribing the original in another language.

When research director Jerry Luther received this letter, it became the “problem statement” for this supplement and for a survey of technical writers:

Most of us who create content for a global market are frustrated by the process. We pay huge amounts for translation, but don’t really understand how to create content that takes full advantage of the localization tools and technologies. We don’t get the kind of feedback from our vendors that would help us to do so. Consequently most of the potential for reusing content in a TM is rarely achieved.

We continue to create non-reusable English content that populates our TMs with non-reusable localized content. We don’t understand how much money we are wasting translating non-essential verbiage, or how much inconsistent language use and terminology are really costing us.

Our technical writing models are based on English-only paradigms that don’t recognize the benefits of standardization, modularity, and content reuse. We don’t yet understand that creating content for many languages must use a different process than creating content for English-only readers. If we rush the creation of English source content (the norm), we pay for it dearly when it comes time to localize. Rewriting English content to reduce redundancy and standardize language has no payback. Doing so for content that will be localized has enormous payback.

Our educational programs have not yet begun to address these issues. We don’t know how to compact and optimize our English source to efficiently deliver multilingual content.

— Al Jaugelis (Manager, Technical Publications, ACL Services Ltd.)

Everyone in this process is a communication specialist. But communication was the biggest problem that writers and translators mentioned, often expressing great frustration. The articles in this supplement attempt to describe and address these frustrations; open a discussion of what technical writers and translators need and how they can help one another; and offer tools and techniques for working better separately and together.

— Laurel Wagers, Managing Editor

M. KATHERINE BROWN is principal for Comgenesis LLC, a communication services and consulting company. She can be reached at kit.brown@comgenesis.com

LAURIE KAMERER is program manager, Translation & Localization Services at Cisco Systems, Inc. She can be reached at lkamerer@cisco.com

DEBRA KRAMASZ is language manager at Prisma International. She can be reached at dkramasz@prisma.com

JOHN M. SMART is the managing partner of SMART Communications, a language engineering consultancy. He can be reached at jsmart@smartny.com
Trends in Writing for Translation

M. Katherine Brown

Internationalization is not rocket science, nor does it necessarily require a significant capital expenditure on the part of the technical communication team. It does, however, add a layer of complexity to the content development process, and it does require planning, communication, time and effort to implement.

Much of content internationalization involves adapting processes to accommodate the needs of the localization team and following the basics of good technical communication — keep it simple, concise and clear; avoid jargon and acronyms; be consistent; understand the audience; avoid text in graphics; and so on. Because these recommendations are so conceptually simple and so practical and cost primarily time to implement, managers often dismiss them immediately as ignoring the real-world issues. Ironically, issues of clarity, consistency and terminology in the source content, as well as insufficient or inefficient processes, are precisely the causes of significant and unnecessary costs in localization.

Several trends, both in business and in writing for translation, are changing the impact of these issues on the localization process. The economy, along with the current business focus on return on investment (ROI) and offshoring of professional jobs, pressures product development teams to create products better, cheaper and faster than ever before. Increased demand for products and services by non-US customers and the more restrictive regulatory environment that has developed in the European Union (EU) force simultaneous releases in the local language and require US-based companies to better understand their global markets. This increased demand, in turn, forces US-based companies and workers to recognize the need for process development, for training and for the development of new metrics for quantifying their work. Also, as a result of these increased pressures, technical communicators have had to develop creative solutions for producing large quantities of content in a myriad of formats, which has led to structured content and single sourcing content management. Structured content and single sourcing, as well as improved workflow technology, are then driving the move toward a streaming development model where the product and content are in constant flux rather than having specific releases of new versions.

Business Climate

Everyone has heard the economists’ doom and gloom statements for the past couple of years. The bursting of the “dot.com bubble” made investors wary and led to thousands of layoffs in the United States and elsewhere. Now, economists are saying that the United States is in a “jobless recovery,” meaning that the economy is improving, but new jobs are not being created. The economists attribute this to offshoring, which means professional jobs are being sent out of the United States to countries such as India where the average professional makes one-fifth the salary of an American in the same job. This phenomenon has been going on for several years in the manufacturing sector, but its application to professional jobs, such as engineering and technical communication, has investors worried and some Americans panicking about the potential brain drain. Offshoring may be less of an issue in Europe, where more stringent labor rules apply, but the implications are clear. In this economy, professionals must be able to quantify their value to the company if they are going to keep their jobs.

More than ever, companies are focusing on cost control and ROI. Product development teams, including technical documentation, need to understand their direct impact on the company’s bottom line, particularly to the cost of localization where an average of $4 is spent on localization for every $1 spent on technical documentation. In other words, if a company is spending $10,000 to produce the source documentation for a product, on average, the localization of that documentation will cost $40,000.

By internationalizing the documentation and product, product development teams can significantly reduce the cost ratio between technical communication and localization without significantly increasing the documentation team’s budget. This works because internationalization, in most cases, involves a modification of existing processes and an improvement in consistency in the source content. With improved editing, change management and error checking, problems are prevented (or caught and fixed) in the source before it goes to localization, rather than having to be fixed in every language into which the content is being localized.

For example, an error requires one hour to fix in the English source, the content is being translated into 34 languages, and it costs $50/hour for the localization engineer to fix it. That one error has added 34 hours to the localization schedule and will cost $1,700 to fix. If that same error is caught and fixed before it goes to localization, the error takes one hour to resolve and costs $50. It doesn’t take long for such errors to significantly impact localization costs.

In addition to internationalizing the product and documentation, product development teams need to automate their processes to stay competitive. Automation accomplishes several things when done appropriately. It enables skilled workers to focus on the most challenging and difficult aspects of a project that don’t lend themselves to automation which, in turn, can lead to greater innovation and improved market share. It reduces the likelihood of human error by removing the people from the more repetitive, mindless tasks in the process. It reduces costs by enabling the same number of people to complete more work in a shorter period of time, and automation improves consistency and quality by ensuring that steps are performed the same way every time the process is used.

For example, IBM asked Lionbridge to help develop an internationalized multilingual support system for IBM. Within 18 months, IBM had saved 30% on localization costs for technical support and calculated that it only needed to defray 45 calls per day to recoup the cost of maintaining the system in each language. Those kinds of cost savings make a huge difference to a company’s bottom line and may mean the difference between success and layoffs.

In this business climate, service companies, including localization companies, are feeling the pinch as well. The localization industry is just coming out of several years of significant consolidation where many small companies have become several big ones. As
these companies have consolidated, they have needed to integrate their infrastructure and to consolidate their assets, all while trying to meet the demands of skeptical investors who, having been burned by the dot.com bust, are wary of investing in companies that aren’t yet showing a profit.

A side effect of being a public company is that decisions often get made based on what will look good on the next quarterly earnings report, rather than what is good for the long-term health of the company. As a result, it is often easier (in the short term) for service companies to reduce head count, which is an immediately obvious expense, than it is to fix the infrastructure redundancies and inefficiencies that occur when companies grow by acquisition. Since people are the primary asset that service companies offer to their clients, unjustifiable choices in the culling process result in a brain drain that can make it more difficult for these companies to meet their deadlines and to accommodate their clients’ needs, particularly in a time of growing demand for localization services.

**Increased International Demand for Localized Content**

Not so very long ago, non-US customers had to wait months after the English release of a product for it to become available in their languages if ever did become available. Today, regulations require and customers worldwide demand simultaneous release in their local languages, particularly for highly regulated products such as medical devices.

For many US-based companies, 40% or more of their revenue comes from non-US sales, further driving the demand for localization (Morgan Stanley presentation, 2003). This business reality is forcing many US-based companies to reengineer their products, processes and business approaches so that the needs of their international customers are considered as an integral part of the product development cycle, rather than as an afterthought to the English release.

While process reengineering has been going on for several years and many multinational companies have become quite sophisticated at integrating localization into their processes, most US-based companies are just now becoming aware of this need. To quantify the costs associated with this endeavor, documentation managers need to treat it like a project and set it up as such in the project accounting system.

The MultiLingual Computing & Technology survey on writing for translation shows a wide range of experience related to this reengineering process. Some respondents have no idea where to even begin to look for resources on internationalization, while others are involved in developing sophisticated multilingual content management systems (CMS). Most internationalization efforts fall between the two extremes, with the process reengineering taking the form of stronger editing processes, robust change management processes, some kind of version control, redesigned templates and content models, and more detailed style guides. None of these solutions requires a sophisticated technology-based CMS, a large usability testing lab or even a large capital expenditure. Any documentation team that has the commitment and the wherewithal to put in the time can develop a low-tech solution that will at least get the team started on the internationalization path.

The software development teams also show a wide range of understanding about internationalization, despite the fact that localizing the code is a significant part of product-related localization costs. Elements such as hard-coded strings, non-dynamic field labels and lack of white space on the screen significantly increase localization costs and yet are relatively easy to prevent and, if necessary, to fix (though retrofitting is often time consuming).

The localization industry, of course, has long been aware of the need for process integration as it responds to increased pressure to shorten the localization cycle without sacrificing quality. Industry pundits lament the commoditization of localization as they scramble to find ways to consolidate their positions in a volatile market, to automate their processes, to educate their customers and to accommodate the move from the traditional localization cycle, where the end of the cycle is clear-cut, toward a streaming release model, where the projects often have no clear end point. Bert Esselink touches on these issues in his article “The Evolution of Localization” (MultiLingual Computing & Technology #57 Supplement).

**Process and Metrics**

Many technical communicators are frustrated by the process of creating global content. Localization is still an unknown quantity for most US-based documentation managers. They finish the English product and documentation and hand it off for the localization team to translate and develop multilingual versions, but in many cases these managers have no real understanding of what information, resources and schedules are needed to produce a quality language variant. Conversely, localization teams often don’t fully understand what feedback is useful to the documentation teams, are so overwhelmed with work that they don’t take the time to provide it, or fail to recognize the unique expertise of their documentation team counterparts. One survey respondent said, “Localization project managers don’t believe that technical writing is a specialized discipline... Technical writers are considered no more than desktop publishers who understand grammar.” This attitude prevailed at the localization vendor despite the fact that over half of this person’s documentation team hold master’s degrees in technical communication.

Overriding themes from survey respondents were more and better communication with the localization team; additional training on internationalization, both for working professionals and for the technical communication students who will soon be in the field; better customer service from the localization vendors and more transparency in the localization process; and improved standards, processes and guidelines, particularly regarding change management and editing.

Even the metrics used to measure output and to develop project estimates are different so project managers end up comparing results for measures that aren’t completely related. For example, technical communication is estimated in hours per page while translation is typically estimated on a per-word basis. Technical communication estimates typically include the research, desktop publishing (DTP) and writing/revising time, while translation estimates typically have those efforts broken out as separate line items.

There are other issues as well. While both technical communication and translation require similar skills in writing, editing and research, these skills are applied very differently. Technical communication tends to be a highly iterative process that involves a great deal of interaction with the product development team and, particularly with new products, starts from a concept and moves through several iterations before being finalized.

Technical communicators spend, on average, less than a third of their time actually writing. Much of their time is spent working with the product development team on product design, informal product testing, interviewing subject matter experts, investigating tools, developing templates, designing help systems, DTP, testing compiled help, performing peer edits, mentoring other team members and so on. Because technical communicators typically work closely with the product development teams, they develop a deep knowledge of the product and often have a more holistic view of it than do the engineers, who typically focus on
one or two aspects of the product. However, technical communicators rarely have control over the last-minute product design changes that inevitably cause significant issues in the content and cause consternation for the localization team. As one survey respondent said, “The process of educating writers, engineers, product and project managers about translation requirements is ongoing.”

Localization, on the other hand, is a production-oriented environment with specialists performing each function. Unlike the technical communicator who is frequently creating original content to explain a particular concept, the translator starts with existing source content and, therefore, has a limited number of ways to interpret those concepts, just as the output requirements, such as templates, limit the variation on the overall look and feel of the language variant.

While translators must transfer the meanings to another language, they do not typically translate word-for-word, but conceptual unit for conceptual unit so that the meaning of the concept is preserved in the translation. In addition, reputable localization companies use translators who are native speakers of the language being translated into (the target language) so that nuances of meaning are maintained and more accurate translations are developed.

Though translators must frequently research the context of something or may need clarification when the localization kit or glossary is incomplete, they have the source content, templates and structure to use as the basis for the language variant they are creating. The translator uses translation memory (TM) tools to facilitate consistency and focuses on the linguistic aspects of the content, and, while they may have a deep knowledge of the industry for which they are translating, translators typically do not possess the depth of product knowledge required of a technical communicator. DTP specialists and localization engineers put the translated content back into the desired output format. This task separation creates a more production-oriented environment for the localization team.

Both technical communicators and translators are highly trained professionals with significant expertise in their chosen fields. When technical communicators and localization team members fail to understand these fundamental differences in approach, communication failures can occur and frustration may ensue.

Structured Content, Single Sourcing and Content Management

Interestingly enough, however, the move toward structured documentation and content management is pushing technical communication toward a production model, as industry moves away from the book paradigm and toward a more fluid view of content as a unit of information where each module represents a particular concept. Modules can be as small as a paragraph or as big as a section.

In this scenario, senior writers and editors work with the document type definition (DTD) designers and software engineers to develop the XML content model, information product design and metadata. Junior and mid-level writers become responsible for writing particular content modules and assigning the approved metadata tags, but no longer worry about the layout and design, the structure of the information (which is predefined by the DTD), or in which medium the content will appear. Instead, they focus only on developing the content; much as a translator working in a TM tool does today.

When such systems are fully implemented, content is completely divorced from the layout and design of the final information product, with the content being stored in a database or other repository. The content is then pulled into a particular format by XSLTs (Extensible Stylesheet Language Transformations) and/or scripts that dictate its final form. Each template, style sheet and scripts associated with structured documentation dictate the structure, metadata and output processing in addition to the layout. With the push of a button and the selection of the appropriate metadata, the writer can produce on-line help, Web page or printed documentation in hours instead of months, assuming the content has been previously developed and is stored in the database, thereby maximizing content reuse. The writer still has to perform the production edit to ensure that nothing has gone awry with the automated DTP process, but the structure and overall look-and-feel are dictated by the pre-defined formats and DTDs.

This methodology has huge implications for localization as well where much of the cost and time associated with localizing content falls into the DTP and localization engineering phases of the project. Because XML and tools associated with it are in their infancy, not all of the tools support all code pages (despite the fact that XML itself is fully Unicode compliant). This means that localization teams must devise custom scripts and other workarounds in order to meet their deadlines. However, assuming that the team has done the appropriate planning and preparation, has developed robust change management and editing processes, and has created and tested the scripts and automated processes with localization in mind, companies could shave three to six weeks or more off of their localization cycle (the time typically required for final DTP). But it may take a release to realize these time and cost savings as the bugs are worked out of the process. The savings don’t stop there, though.

Because such systems have many team members creating and editing content, it becomes necessary to implement stringent controls over the development, editing, storage, retrieval and change management of the content. Style guides, terminology management and strong editing processes are vital to success in such environments; otherwise, content developed by different writers and pulled together into a single deliverable may not flow correctly, thereby reducing its usability. In addition, if it takes the writers more than a few minutes to find an existing content module, they will simply write another one so that the content must be structured, indexed and tagged with metadata in such a way that the writers can enter a keyword and find the content they need immediately.

Quality metadata, stringent editing processes and robust change management processes are vital to the success of these systems. Quality metadata enables the writer to quickly...
Working Effectively with Documentation Teams:
Tips for Localization Vendors

Establish a rapport with the documentation team. Take time to understand its processes, limitations and needs. Spend time getting to know clients. A good relationship with the client enables you to resolve problem situations more effectively. Follow up conference calls with e-mails confirming understanding of the action items.

Educate your clients on what you need from them to be effective. Many US-based documentation teams have little understanding of localization processes and what your team needs to produce a quality product. For new clients, use the first project meeting to provide them with checklists and training on your processes and set their expectations accurately.

Identify where your processes intersect with the documentation team’s processes and work to ensure smooth handoffs to reduce last-minute crunches. Show client the process and explain where it is most cost-effective to introduce changes. Under the client’s product development process and suggest ways to make it more efficient.

Work with your clients to create measurements of success. Learn your client’s language of business and help them quantify cost savings. Show them where internationalization efforts are producing ROI in time and money savings. If their template contains issues that add to DTP time, explain how this adds to costs. Help the client improve time-to-market.

Be responsive to requests from your clients to help ensure localization requirements are included in the overall project plan. Respond to inquiries in 24 to 48 hours if you need to research a response; let the client know when you will get back to him or her. Ask clients to prioritize requests. If the client is asking for information from you, take it as a good sign.

Provide your clients with lists of what they need to include with handoffs, the information you need and in what format. Take time to explain what you need and why. It will make handoffs more efficient and reduce time-consuming re-drops.

Be responsive to requests for input on tools and processes. This indicates that the client is considering your requirements when making buying decisions.

Plan for late-breaking changes, scheduling issues and scope changes. Much of localization depends on getting source content from the client on time. Delays and changes lead to last-minute crunches and stress for team members. Discuss change management, including costs, so clients can evaluate the cost/benefit ratio of changes they are considering.

Close the feedback loop. Actively identify problem areas in the source content. Most localization vendors use some sort of issue tracking, so make sure the client is in the loop for issues that stem from the source content. Explain why it’s an issue and suggest solutions. Taking an hour early in the project to provide this information could save a week’s worth of work later on.

Communicate, communicate, communicate. Every project post-mortem I have attended has listed communication as an issue. It is virtually impossible to communicate too much. Request that your client provide you with a primary contact for technical questions. If you see a problem, be proactive and let the client know as early as possible. Provide solutions.

Working Effectively with Localization Vendors:
Tips for Documentation Teams

Build a relationship with a localization vendor who understands your business model and needs. This enables you to resolve problem situations effectively. At the beginning of the project, take time to get to know the localization team members.

Train your team. Internalization works only if your team understands its importance and how to effectively implement changes. Many people have limited exposure to other cultures. This education process is critical. Help your team see its impact on the company’s bottom line.

Examine your processes, template and style guide for issues that impact localization and then take steps to correct problems. Spend 40-60 hours updating your processes, style guide and templates to better accommodate localization. You can save as much as 10% on your localization costs and achieve higher quality products. Projects will run more smoothly.

Create measurements of success. Enlist your localization vendor’s help to quantify the cost savings that internationalization provides.

Include the localization vendor in initial project scheduling discussions so localization requirements are included as part of the overall project plan. If the vendor tells you that it will take 8 weeks to turn around a document in 34 languages, believe him or her. Quality localized products require planning.

Provide your localization vendor with detailed instructions and information about how you developed source documentation, graphics and screen shots. Provide all the source files they need to do the work. If you are using an application to produce source content that doesn’t support some of your languages, the vendor needs to know so that he or she can develop a workaround.

Evaluate new tools and processes with internationalization and localization issues in mind. If you can’t reproduce an advance feature in all of your required languages, don’t use it. Your localization vendor can help you identify limitations with the tools.

Build robust change management and editing processes. Change happens, so learn to evaluate change and prioritize it based on where you are in the process for more effective cost control. If content is in the final quality assurance stage, you pay twice for engineering, translation and DTP time for each language affected. A strong editing process helps catch errors and issues early in the development process, thus preventing expensive updates later.

Close the feedback loop. Ask your localization vendor to deliver a report of localization issues found at each stage. This enables you to fix problems before final files are sent to localization, saving time and costs. Every error or problem in the source documentation is multiplied by the number of times it occurs and by the number of target languages.

Communicate, communicate, communicate. Every post-mortem I’ve attended has listed communication as an issue. It is virtually impossible to communicate too much. The localization vendor needs to know in advance about any changes that impact the delivery or release schedule, as well as changes that significantly alter the documentation. Identify areas of concern that are highly visible, and let the localization team know when they’ve stabilized. Ask the localization vendor what information will help them do their jobs more efficiently. Assign a team member to be the primary contact with the localization vendor and ensure that the vendor’s questions are answered within 24-48 hours. Centralize your project information such as schedules, bug reports and meeting minutes so that everyone on the team has access to the information, even if they are not located on the same site. An extranet portal is great for this purpose.
only vital changes are made, and then only after the team has completed a cost/benefit analysis (which can be as simple as saying that there is an unacceptable risk of death or injury if this change is not made).

All of these process improvements not only improve the quality of the source content by making it more consistent but also have a direct impact on localization costs. Esselink provided the following example: If a customer has a document that is currently being updated and does not have a CMS, the customer typically pays for verification checks on full matches and fuzzy matches. (Fuzzy matches occur when some of the text in a segment is identical to previously translated source text, but other text is not.) On the other hand, with a CMS, only new text is sent to the translator, so the translator doesn't see the existing, unchanged text. This process can save significant localization costs in terms of file preparation, translation time, match payments and so on.

Even if the documentation team is not ready for single sourcing, XML or a technology-driven CMS, implementing robust change management and editing processes and improving consistency will better position the team for making the transition to such systems. At the same time, these processes will provide immediate cost savings on localization. For example, just by implementing internationalization recommendations and improving the editing process, one client achieved a 20% savings on localization with the next release and increased customer satisfaction scores at the same time. While other teams may not see such a high return immediately, internationalization is still worth the effort as the ROI becomes apparent over time.

As mentioned in Donald DePalma's article, "Establishing Key Performance Indicators for Localization" (MultiLingual Computing & Technology #57 Supplement), one of the roadblocks to doing this is that localization and documentation typically come out of different budgets within a company, so unless the two teams work out a cost-sharing agreement, the significant savings are reaped by the internal localization management team, while the costs for implementing the processes come out of the documentation team's budget. And because most companies haven't developed the metrics for quantitatively correlating the internationalization process with savings, it's difficult for the documentation team to quantify their value. Looking holistically at the problem, this issue seems rather silly since ultimately all the money involved comes from the company's pocket, but this is a business reality. The caution here is for the documentation manager to work closely with the internal localization budget manager to ensure that cost-sharing is in place and that the metrics quantify the cost savings once interna-tionalization processes are in place.

Streaming Development Model

The traditional development model meant freezing the code and documentation at a point in time and shipping it to the customer. Only when the source code and documentation were finalized were they sent to localization.

With the streaming development model, the content and product are continuously updated with little concern for a specified release schedule. This methodology is possible because of the more sophisticated tools for content management, as well as for automating workflow.

What frequently happens is that the content is evaluated for stability, and the most stable content is approved and sent to the localization team, while the more volatile content is still under review. As each batch of content is approved by the product development team, it is sent to the localization team via automated workflows in a continuous update cycle.

While these processes primarily apply to multilingual Web sites with database-driven content, there is potential for these techniques to be applied to more traditional documentation, as tools become more sophisticated and as more companies adopt technology-based CMS.

The implications for both localization and content development are clear. Both teams must become comfortable working with content that is in greater flux and where product release is not the driving factor in the deadlines, but customer need is. These teams must work closely together to develop efficient processes for transferring content in a continuous flow, while stringently managing costs and changes.

Conclusion

These days, everyone wants a quick fix, but not every problem has one. Unfortunately, there are no magic potions, no real shortcuts to ensuring that internationalization is done effectively. Internationalization and writing for translation have many variables associated with them, even without considering the scope and schedule issues that inevitably arise. Tweaking even one of these variables can significantly impact localization costs.

So, how does one get started? First, educate the documentation team members on the need for internationalization. Help them to understand the business drivers for such changes. Then analyze and revise the style guide, templates and processes so that they better accommodate localization. Identify areas where similar content is used over and over and then standardize it so that it can be reused more effectively. Build robust editing and change management processes and use at least a basic version control system.

As Paula Berger, a technical communication consultant, points out, "Writers are learning that modularizing, standardizing and reusing content benefits their writing in terms of quality improvement as well as time and cost savings. It’s not a big leap for them to then see how they can reap those same benefits by extending their use of modularity, standardization and reuse to their localization process, their document management process and eventually to a CMS.”

Internationalizing content doesn’t require a huge capital expenditure or fancy CMS. All it requires is good processes, team commitment and a little ingenuity. The reward is in the significant cost savings to the company in terms of localization, and internationalization positions the team for moving toward a more sophisticated CMS. That’s a story every manager likes to hear, especially in today’s economy. ∞
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www.languageintelligence.com

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A significant number of Multilingual Computing & Technology readers are global writers who create documentation that will be translated. They are among the unsung heroes of the global information age—a cadre of creative, disciplined wordsmiths who first put written form to the ideas, concepts and instructions necessary to place products and services in the global supply chain.

This group expresses, particularly through the conference presentations and publications of the Society for Technical Communication (STC), an urgent call for attention to particular issues among these professionals. To obtain specific comments, we conducted a survey, “Writers Who Write Documentation for Translation.”

The predominant theme among the 315 respondents from all over the globe was the need for improved communication between themselves and translators. The survey comments on these pages reflect the sense of a wall over which the writer throws work files to an unseen, unknown entity called the translator. This wall is composed of time and distance constraints, a variety of necessary intermediaries such as project managers and localization vendors, and a general lack of understanding and training in the overall processes, tools and linguistic mechanics.

The full compilation of the survey questions and responses is available at www.multilingual.com/survey. Particular thanks to M. Katherine Brown of Comgenesis, LLC, and to Susan Harkus with Net Return for their collaboration on the survey design. Also, many thanks to the scores of STC chapter officers and editors who helped to distribute the survey to their members.

**Technical Writers Comment**

Jerry Luther

My biggest struggle is educating product engineers and developers about what is required to design internationalized products. We have great resources here, but often software engineers are clueless about such things as the need to segregate text strings from code, avoid concatenating strings, and take care in naming features and components.

At the start of the project, the project plan should include reasonable time for “communication issues” that inevitably arise during translation. This requires that the project manager (and the rest of the development team for that matter) be better educated about translation issues.

Teach writers how to identify and avoid ambiguous and idiomatic language. If possible, hire multilingual writers. Though they only write in their first language, they will understand the challenges that translators face. Where locale-specific technical differences exist, identify relevant areas in the source material, and make sure the translators have the necessary target-locale specific equivalents. Communicate with the translation team. Communicate with target-locale colleagues.

We need to interact with the translators to know the problems they face and try to minimize them.

Translator and writer should work more closely from the beginning. This results in fewer errors and a far more productive relationship.

We must have better, and direct, communication between translators and writers. Seems like it’s common practice for both sides to work in a vacuum. Writers and translators should be in contact throughout the development process and should have a thorough understanding of the other profession’s tools and processes. This is the obvious way to improve the quality of the end product.

I think there needs to be more communication between writers/editors and translators before translation/localization takes place to avoid problems.

To me, the first step is better communication among translation vendor, company representatives in the target country and me.

Communication
More knowledge of the translation process. Direct contact with the translation agency may be better than through a localization manager — the current situation.

Upper management needs to be aware of the potential for reducing costs of translation and committed to devoting the necessary resources or us in technical communications to write accordingly.

Corporate culture and support are critical because critical changes in work methods, scheduling and production of initial content make such a difference in the quality of finished product.

I worked for almost three years for a major translation company, and the localization project managers did not believe that technical writing was a specialized discipline that requires skill, education, training and experience. Technical writers were considered no more than desktop publishers who understood grammar.

My needs are twofold: I need more training, and I need to get buy-in from the decision makers here. Without the training, I don’t think I can back up my recommendations effectively, and without the buy-in, I have to live with poor processes.

I would like a better understanding of the process my translator uses from the point he or she receives my files to the time a translation project is completed.

We need to stop trying to do simultaneous worldwide releases of the documentation. Most of the non-native English-speaking customers I’ve spoken to use the English documentation anyway because the quality of the translated documentation is so poor.

Two out of four project managers at translation firms fall into one of the following categories: (1) act as blocks to getting the right answers for their translators; (2) have poor relationships with their team so that the translators/editors don’t feel comfortable asking questions; (3) their company indirectly discourages a collaborative environment for the translating team; or (4) they fail to perform basic quality checks before returning “final” translated materials.

I am the only writer in my group who actually accesses translation memory. It helps to explain to the others how translation tools work. Then the requirements start to make sense.

Training transaltors on the product so they can produce the screen shots.

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Any standards or guidelines at all for writing. Any guidelines for producing documents or computer-based materials in multiple languages and how to manage these documents. More guidelines on the memory assets and a structure for this.

Any standards or guidelines at all for writing. Any guidelines for producing documents or computer-based materials in multiple languages and how to manage these documents. More guidelines on the memory assets and a structure for this.

Internationally accepted business functional terms with explanation must be available to all in the translation profession. Globally accepted abbreviations must be standardized and published for the translation professionals.

The guidelines are clear. The problem is enforcing them, and to do so you need a very good editor.

There is a lack of resources on how to improve text in the source language in order to improve translation quality: common mistakes to avoid, explanation of what might be confusing to the translator and why, and so on. It is generally difficult imagining the issues a translator might encounter without having any translating experience.

“Writing for translation” should also include doing the translating, which I spend about 20% of my time doing (Japanese to English). This is only possible because in my field (electronics) the terms and symbols used are precisely defined. The original document must first be correct to get a “correct” translation (or garbage in, garbage out).

Document management tools, common terminology (consistency) and security all are issues.

Vendors could provide a localization-specific style guide of issues to consider. Vendors could also provide training workshops when they establish a new relationship with a client or when requested.

Structuring the information is everything. Readers can overcome most of the convoluted sentences if they can just find the information.

Training

Training

Document management tools, common terminology (consistency) and security all are issues.

Standards and Guidelines

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How long have you been writing documentation that is to be translated?
- 23.4% 2 years or less
- 31.4% 2 to 5 years
- 21.8% 5 to 10 years
- 17.3% 10 to 15 years
- 6.1% 15 or more years

How prepared are you to write documentation that will be translated?
- 7.0% 1 (inadequately)
- 25.4% 2
- 34.9% 3
- 32.7% 4 (quite adequately)

In your industry, what is the trend in demand for writing documentation that is to be translated?
- 70.2% Increasing
- 6.4% Decreasing
- 23.4% Staying the same

How positive and effective is your working relationship with the individuals and groups who translate your work product?
- 8.8% 1 (poor)
- 22.3% 2
- 42.3% 3
- 26.6% 4 (excellent)

Which of the following subjects are currently the most problematic in your individual or group efforts to write and complete projects for translation? (Check all that apply)
- 44.6% Terminology issues
- 33.0% Understanding the needs of the localization team
- 26.3% Linguistic structure issues (modularity/chunking)
- 26.3% In-country review issues
- 24.9% Idiomatic expressions
- 20.8% Brevity
- 15.2% Other

Employment status:
- 13.7% work for themselves
- 39.0% work for large corporations or enterprises
- 40.3% work for small to medium-sized companies
- 1.9% work in educational, institutional or nonprofit organizations
- 5.1% are currently unemployed

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You already know the value of considering translation early in the document development process, but have you ever thought of translation and writing as parallel processes? I see translation as the multilingual counterpart of writing and document processing in the global communication process. In my experience on both sides of translation as agency owner and freelancer, I’ve learned that translation requires more than language proficiency. Translation is an interdisciplinary profession that encompasses writing and research skills and technological competency to work with several software applications, in addition to a professional level of language proficiency. Translation also involves adapting a text to another audience as well as document processing and project management.

Just as developing an English document may take months as it crosses the desks of writers and editors, subject matter experts, sales and marketing managers and vice presidents, so does producing a translation. The document can go before a translator, editor, subject matter expert, in-country reviewer, desktop publishing (DTP) specialist, proofreader and client before a final translation is ready for distribution.

Merging Fields

In fact, I’ve noticed a growing trend: the fields of writing and translation are merging. According to Dr. Christiane Melançon and Professor Marco Fiola at the Université du Québec en Outaouais (UQO), which offers a B.A. in Translation and Professional Writing, “Translation and writing have merged, at least here [Canada], and it’s a fact.” In an interview via e-mail in April 2003, Melançon and Fiola provided some insights into the merging of these two fields. They noted that in Canada “translators are often asked to work as writers, and vice versa,” resulting in the launch of the B.A. in Translation and Professional Writing as a “direct response to regional requirements.” These translation educators see writing and translation skills as complementary. Melançon and Fiola explained, “Skills as text critics, which translators hone during their training as translators, are extremely helpful to them when they have to write original texts themselves. They develop better writing skills, which help increase their awareness of the many linguistic pitfalls to which they are exposed as language professionals.” The development of a dual-competency writing and translation degree signals that the discipline of writing is being extended to encompass the field of translation, which is partly writing across languages. Combining these complementary skills is being recognized as having a valuable role in the communication chain.

In the US translation industry, leading this merging trend are the technical and literary sectors. An increasing number of translation agencies specializing in technical translation are offering technical writing and editing services. A few examples are Iverson Language Associates in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; The Geo Group in Madison, Wisconsin; and Bowne Global Solutions headquartered in Parsippany, New Jersey. Technical writing, or “English services,” can be offered either as part of the technical translation service or as a separate service depending on the needs of the client. Many technical translation agencies have evolved into global communications companies by offering the related and overlapping monolingual and multilingual writing and DTP services. They can get involved farther upstream in the global communication process with the internationalization of the original English documentation or as a separate English project.

For example, The Geo Group, a technical translation company, provided English technical writing as part of a project involving translating a German manual into four other languages via English. English was used as an intermediary language. Owner and president Georgia Roeming explained, “The Geo Group compared the cost of translating the project, scenario one, from German > four languages; and the cost to translate the project, scenario two, from German > English > four languages. Scenario two was less expensive. Surprised? We found that there are more resources available when English is in one of the language pairs.”

When translation companies create the source document or English document, “clients realize tangible cost savings and reduced timelines,” according to Roeming. “This happens when there is a collaboration between the agency and the technical writer. The agency provides direction for document preparation such as avoiding the overuse of acronyms, using graphic call outs, formatting for varying
language lengths, accommodating different paper sizes, as well as other tricks of the trade." The technical writing and translation are usually done by different professionals. "A translator can be a technical writer depending on his or her DTP skills, but a technical writer can not be a translator unless he or she is bilingual and has a translation skill set, certification and experience," Roeming pointed out.

The information exchange and cooperation between the writing and translation worlds extend to conferences and professional associations. Translation firms are exhibiting at technical communication conferences, and the 2002-2003 president of the Society for Technical Communication (STC) Twin Cities chapter is the president of a translation firm, Prisma International. When I asked Prisma president James Romanoin in an e-mail interview about his involvement with both translation and the STC, he replied, "Everything is merging into the general category of 'content,' and the tasks of both tech writers and translators center around the management of content in whatever language happens to be needed by a given target audience."

Likewise, technical communication associations cooperate with translator associations. STC publications announce the conferences of the American Translators Association (ATA) and feature translation articles. Both translators and technical communicators post messages to the listserv of STC's international special interest group.

The Technical Communication Connection

Technical communication is a relatively new discipline. When I tell people that I am a "technical communicator," I am accustomed to seeing that blank look on their faces. They assume it's a new-fangled term for "technical writing." As technology advanced, technical writing and editing expanded to a full-fledged communication discipline to encompass other skills such as research, document design, Web development, usability testing, training and localization, in addition to technical writing and editing.

Technical communication deals with pragmatic texts or documents used for real-life situations in a technical context. Any nonliterary document belongs to a genre of technical communication, from resumes to legal complaints to multimedia games. Some technical contexts can involve safety issues and hazardous materials. You can imagine the ramifications of a mistranslation in the documentation of a nuclear power plant, say, emergency meltdown procedures, as opposed to a novel. No one's life hangs in the balance if there is an omission in the translation of a literary work, whereas the lives of millions can be at stake if there is an omission in the translation of emergency procedures. Writing procedures is a genre in itself involving certain components and methodologies. Translators with knowledge about these text genres and conventions are better prepared to produce successful translations.

Technical communicators act as liaisons between subject matter experts and the audience to collect, analyze, interpret and organize information in a way the audience will understand, whether for third-graders or rocket scientists. Technical communicators are "working at the intersection of art and science, generating light so that others may see," as a seasoned technical communicator expressed it in the article "What Is a Technical Communicator?" in STC's magazine Intercom, January 2002. You could say that technical communicators are monolingual translators of technology. It is likely that a technical communicator wrote and indexed the instruction manual for that cordless phone that you purchased, developed and conducted usability testing for the Web site that you visited last, and participated on the localization team. Rarely will you find a technical communicator with the title "Technical Communicator." Their job titles vary widely — for example, technical writer, editor, information architect, information engineer, documentation specialist, grantwriter, information officer, illustrator and Web designer to name a few.

Alongside the technical translation sector, heading up the trend to merge writing and translation is the literary translation sector. The University of Arkansas' Web site for the Program in Literary Translation (www.uark.edu/depts/english/PCWT/trans.htm) states its assumption that "a translation of a literary work is an act of creative writing."

Writing Curriculum in Translation Education

Writers are learning about translatability issues while writing curriculum is being added to translation training programs. "Writers need not be able to translate, but translators do need to know how to write well," explained Melançon and Fiola. The value of good writing skill in one's native language is being recognized as an additional component for a polished translation. Simply speaking a language like a native does not make one a good writer. This correlation holds true even in monolingual situations. Without training in writing techniques, document conventions and field terminology, a native English speaker could produce no better an English patent or brochure than a native Spanish speaker could in Spanish.

"All translation problems finally resolve themselves into problems of how to write well in the target language," translation expert Peter Newmark has said (quoted by Maria-Luisa Arias-Moreno in "Doing the Write Stuff: The Translator's First Duty," ATA Chronicle, November/December 2001). In the article, Arias-Moreno advocates for writing curriculum to be included in translator education programs such as hers does in Guadalajara, Jalisco, Mexico.

Translation educators have started to recognize the value of integrating writing curriculum into translation degree programs and, as Melançon and Fiola pointed out, making graduates "aware of the role they play in the chain of communication, be it as translators or writers."
Translation Degree Programs

The writing/translation connection has recently become more formalized with the development of translation degrees that include writing curriculum.

In Canada, several translation programs place an emphasis on the writing component. A look at the B.A. in Translation and Professional Writing offered at the UQO gives us a good idea of the language professional of the future: the language engineer.

This degree consists of a true dual-competency program in translation and writing. The curriculum includes several writing courses, such as written communication, writing methodologies, documentation and terminology, specialized writing, and creative workshops.

The Honours B.A. in Translation degree at Glendon College, York University in Toronto includes four writing courses: Writing and Style; Problems in Professional Writing; Techniques in Business and Technical Writing; and Techniques of Textual Revision.

The Master’s in Translation at York University includes three writing courses: The Translation of Style, which includes writing conventions; Specialized Translation, which involves analysis of writing conventions of a specific field; and Introduction to Editing.

In the United States, most translation programs leading to a degree include only a single writing course as part of the curriculum. The exceptions are the literary-based translation degrees, such as the Master of Fine Arts Degree in Translation at the University of Arkansas and the Ph.D. and Master of Arts degrees with emphasis in creative writing and translation offered at the University of Dallas.

The “Write” Advantage

These degrees were developed in response to real-world translation needs. As the translation profession develops and matures, it is becoming evident that to be a good translator, one must be a good writer.

The view of the translator-writer model has come a long way since 1790 when Sir John Denham described a translator’s writing abilities:

Such is our pride, our folly, or our fate that few, but such as cannot write, translate.

On the contrary, translators must be very good writers. Interestingly, translation courses were recommended for literary writers in the fall 2002 Ruminator Review published at Macalaster College, Saint Paul, Minnesota. Author Brigitte Frase wrote, “Ideally, writing workshops should require translation exercises...You return to your own work with a refreshed and more finely tuned imagination, a subtler understanding of forms and a better ear.”

Translators knowledgeable about writing conventions can recast the message correctly in the target language, avoiding such pitfalls as dangling modifiers, incorrect punctuation and convention violations of the document genre. For example, translators working into English will know to use non-sexist language as well as active and positive constructions even if the source text was written in gender-biased language and passive or negative constructions.

Writing for Translation

Having seen how the fields of writing and translation intersect, writers can use some techniques to facilitate the translation process. To provide some insight on what is involved in the translation process and how writers of documentation can facilitate it, I interviewed an experienced English to German translator, Sigrid Coats, who has spent 35 years translating English documentation.

Use specific verbs. Coats recommends that writers “use specific terms, especially specific verbs.” Remember that the translator, unless involved early in the document development process, lacks the context in which the document was developed. Coats had just finished translating a complex document on pacemakers that frequently used a general verb, deploy. The first occurrence of deploy implied insert:

- Deploy the device into the artery.
- The second occurrence implied expand:
  - an expansion deployed in the artery unfolds and attaches itself to the walls.
- “Every time deploy appeared,” she explained, “I had to make sure it was not used in a different way.” A single German equivalent to deploy did not make sense in every occurrence, so Sigrid had to decode the meaning of the word in each case. According to The American Heritage Dictionary, deploy means to put into action. Each instance of deploy conveyed a different meaning in German. The first instance implied insert, the second, expand and so on. So, Coats had to translate into German using a different specific verb in place of the catch-all deploy in each instance. It’s like tying a blindfold on the translator and asking her to stumble around and identify what she is dealing with.

During the translation process, the original English text gets picked apart and broken down to the universal human concept level of meaning. When the message is unclear, the translator must spend time to try to identify the underlying meaning. If producers of documentation used specific verbs, they would speed up translation saving time and, thus, saving money.

Modify the correct clause. Coats pleads for writers to separate positive and negative clauses with the appropriate verbs. Review the sentences to make sure they’re all

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correctly modified." The following phrasing confused her:

... in order to maintain the arterial contribution to the cardiac output ... and [to prevent] VV intolerance.

The first part of the sentence is positive up to and VV intolerance. As written, the ending means to maintain VV intolerance, which is clearly not the intended message. The basic structure was intended to look like this:

... in order to maintain the arterial contribution ... and to prevent VV intolerance.

To avoid a translation indicating the opposite, incorrect message, Coats had to add the verb to prevent to signal the switch to a negative clause ... and to prevent VV intolerance.

These incorrectly modified phrases and unintended meanings can create quite humorous messages sometimes. I once received a fax from an entertainment complex that stated "Today's Elephant Walk Cancelled Due to Weather Conditions. Elephants will be made available for comment upon request." We all enjoy these mishaps when it's someone else's document and serious injury isn't involved, but when we deal with safety documentation, incorrect references can be a life-or-death matter.

Use clear action structures. Writers can improve the readability of agent/action sentences if they use clear subjects performing strong actions. Clarify what is happening and who is doing it to and what to or whom. Not only does this technique make the text more readable, but it also reduces the need for the translator to make incorrect assumptions or stop for clarifications. Writers who use clear agent/action structures lay the groundwork for faster and more accurate translations.

Use consistent terminology. In addition to specific verbs and clear agent/action sentences, consistent terminology helps Coats speed up translation. She says that "if a stopcock is referred to as a valve in one paragraph, then referred to as a port in another, it's confusing, and I have to figure out if they're referring to the same thing." The passage was: Close stopcock and always leave side port stopcock closed when not in use.

There is only one stopcock. This structure distinguishes a stopcock from a side port stopcock and leads anyone not familiar with the context to infer that there must be more than one stopcock. The translator must stop and request clarification. Using consistent terminology throughout the documents facilitates both human and machine translation.

Avoid noun strings. Working with English-language documentation, Coats grapples with long noun strings. "English can use several nouns as adjectives such as office door keyhole. It's difficult to tell which is for which," she explains. In a study of controlled languages by Emily A. Thrush (Technical Communication, August 2002) Thrush cited Cohen and others who conducted a study of native speakers of Hebrew and found that lengthy noun phrases "not too surprisingly interfered significantly with their subjects' ability to comprehend a text on genetics." The conventions of many languages do not allow noun stacking like English, so the translator must unravel which noun modifies the other to render the message in the target language.

A writer could remedy the confusion of nouns used as adjectives by breaking up the noun string. For example, the keyhole of the office door or even the office door's keyhole distinguishes the subject noun from the object nouns and possessive nouns.

Introduce the translator to the context. Without the background and context in which the document was written, translators can make incorrect assumptions from ambiguous structures. Just as a writer requires a framework of understanding for the topic to produce the English version, so does the translator. Whitney Beth Potusz and Kaarina Kvaavik wrote in Intercom (May 2001), "Translators need to be introduced to your process and trained in your templates, glossaries, style guides, project management approach, development of life cycles, marketing, collateral, Web content, software, etc. All these can affect the production schedule for your translation." When translators are in tune with the document background and process, they translate faster and more accurately.

Writing is a language activity. When writers work, whether to create an instruction manual or novel, they are engaging in a language activity related to translation and terminology. Both writing and translation are communication disciplines with the borderlines between them fading. As Mélanson and Fola have said, "Given the fact ... that [Quebec] is on the forefront of the Canadian translation industry, we believe that this may be the beginning of a trend." This trend has reached the United States, as Romano confirms. "The business pressures of time, cost, and quality, as well as the tools and technologies of the field, are blurring the traditional lines between source and target documents, between an 'original' English document and its translated offshoots," he explains.

The development of the B.A. in Translation and Professional Writing degree by the Université du Québec in Canada signals the permanent value of these fields joining and that the trend will only spread. Ω
Controlled English for Global Business

John M. Smart

In the Middle Ages, the Italian nation-states developed what we call today a lingua franca, from the Italian language for “Frankish language.” The first lingua franca was a pidgin language based on Italian, but with a mixture of Spanish, French, Greek and Arabic. The lingua franca allowed explorers such as Marco Polo to enter China and to discover the noodle, gunpowder and different writing systems. Other examples of a lingua franca are Bazaar Malay, Caribbean Creoles, African Swahili and the English in parts of India.

Fast forward to 2000, the dawn of the age of globalization and global television news. Today’s nation-states are the multinationals such as IBM, Shell, ExxonMobil, Philips and Toyota that rely on e-business, global Web and e-mail to communicate. The new medium of satellite television allows scientific, technical and political information to reach anywhere in the globe in two seconds. Few companies, however, have localized their product support information into languages such as Mongolian, Hausa, Thai or Maori because of the cost. At the same time, the emerging nations receive continuous exposure to technology. Some linguists estimate that more than 7,000 languages are spoken in the world.

English as the New Lingua Franca

Many companies view the art of translation as slow, prone to error and expensive. The most common excuse heard for not translating is “They all speak English.”

Today, the number of people in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) who speak and use English is greater than the entire population of the United Kingdom. English classes in China are in demand as the rising technological class recognizes the need to understand English.

Today, the five most commonly spoken languages (in rank) are Mandarin Chinese, English, Spanish, Portuguese and Hindi. Statistically, the language of the most populous nation, the PRC, would be the lingua franca of the twenty-first century, but it is not. The PRC plans to teach Tourist English to 88,000 Beijing taxi drivers for the 2008 Olympic Games.

The Evolution of Controlled English

Much of modern English is derived from old Norman French, circa 1450 CE. French words were adapted, such as forêt becoming forest. This evolution has taken 1,500 years, and now English has reached 850,000-plus terms. Time magazine recently estimated that 10,000 new words are added each year. English also borrows words from other languages, for example, serendipity from Arabic, cameo and violin from Italian and alligator from Spanish.

By comparison, the French language has in 2003 adopted the word courriel for e-mail, E-mail and Email, while English offers yet another new term, spam.

Controlled English focuses on the written form because spoken English has tones that make pronunciation difficult to learn. For example, the English sh sound is common to the words ocean, fuchsia, anxious and fissure. Another problem occurs when two words are spelled two ways, such as data base and database.

1920: A common language called BASIC English. The first attempt at a common language was Esperanto, harpered by the requirement that both the writer and the reader learn a new artificial language. In 1932, an eccentric Englishman, C.K. Odgen, hit upon the idea of an 800-word Simplified English vocabulary. He called his invention “BASIC English.” This seed became the first recorded Controlled English vocabulary.

a method to convey service information for heavy equipment used to build the trans-Amazon highway in Brazil. Caterpillar created a 1,200-word vocabulary based on BASIC English. To make Controlled English work, Caterpillar added technical and engineering terms such as gooseneck connector (shaped like the neck of a goose) and ABC for automatic blade control (not the Roman alphabet). The Caterpillar Technical English vocabulary works because each term has one defined meaning.

1980: The Development of AECMA Simplified English. In 1988, the Fokker Aircraft company in The Netherlands developed a variation of Caterpillar English to write manuals for Fokker aircraft maintained in remote parts of the world. In 1988, a European aerospace association (AECMA) created Simplified English and mandated its use for technical manuals. Today, some 845 airlines and most aircraft manufacturers write technical instructions in AECMA Simplified English, as in the accompanying example.

Many readers who have never seen Simplified English will be surprised to see that the text and content remain technical. The simplification is achieved by the restricted use of a common set of 208 verbs, standard terminology and better visual presentation in SGML/XML. The Simplified English text is easier to read, comprehend, reuse and translate.

The 985 common terms that form the base of AECMA Simplified English, Standard PSC-85-16598, are less than 1% of the English language. The final vocabulary is expanded by the terminology unique to a product or service. The aerospace requirement for Simplified English enforces a standardized language for a product that has a 30-year shelf life.

The Introduction of Controlled English

The AECMA Simplified English vocabulary is unique to aerospace, with approved verbs such as feather, ferry and wet-motor. Because these verbs are not found in the vocabularies for other industries, they must be replaced with industry-specific verbs. For example, abort and debug are common to the computer industry, but have problems with meaning and global use. The verb abort is easily replaced with the verb stop. The computer industry verb debug, which comes from a moth found in a vacuum tube, is replaced with find the faults.

Text Mining

The development of a controlled language can be difficult and expensive without linguistic analysis tools. The text mining by computer takes days, not months.

As an example, the Hyster Company in the United States needed a controlled language in order to write the maintenance manuals for its gas and electric-powered lift trucks. The primary concerns were accident reduction and better technician training. Hyster also recognized the need to communicate globally at a common US eighth-grade reading level.

The SMART Text Miner quickly found the unique Hyster terms such as regenerative braking and uprights. These terms were added to the Controlled English vocabulary to create a meaningful technical vocabulary. The next task was to rewrite all new training and maintenance materials in a 2,500-word Controlled English vocabulary called the Hyster Easy Language Program (HELP). This simple, low-cost action aligned the writer to
the reader. The results were well received by the dealers, trainers and most writers. Hyster saw a reduction in accidents, and new technologies were easier to introduce. Hyster used Controlled English to reach its audience in the United States and 131 other countries.

**Controlled English for Advanced Technologies**

In another case, the Canadian telecommunications giant Nortel Networks needed to control new telephony abbreviations such as DSL, GSM, GPRS and TCP/IP. In 1995, our firm developed Nortel Standard English (NSE) to control the expansion of terminology and to help Nortel Networks introduce new telecommunications concepts to their customers.

The first term removed was POTS, an industry acronym for Plain Old Telephone Service. One of the several reasons for this is that POTS can also mean potentiometers and is commonly written on engineering blueprints. Another reason is that the evolution of telephony with XDSL, DSL, T1, Cellular and VoIP makes “plain old telephone service” obsolete. The correct term is now land line, which implies a copper cable, not a satellite service. In addition, the audience had changed. Countries such as Indonesia (as well as China and most of Africa) went directly cellular and satellite. They never had anything old.

The introduction of NSE came at a good time because the world went global with cellular technologies in less than a decade.

**Enforcing the Rules**

Controlled English has many benefits, but they can not be achieved without the enforcement of the rules and vocabulary. Our firm developed the MAXit Checker tool to monitor and report on the authoring process. This tool fits into most authoring platforms to act as a silent partner for the writer. In the example below, the underscored text represents the colored error messages inserted by the checker. The writer has the final word and must rearrange the content for simplicity and usability within the rules.

**Original Sentence**

The discovery of a network comprising multiple PP8600s (v3.2.2, v3.2.2.2, v3.2.3 and v3.3), several Vlans and a Forwarding Data Base comprising several thousand entries causes Optivity Network Management System (ONMS) Subnet Discovery process (Topsi) to use 100% of the CPU and take an excessive time to complete.

**Rewritten text — 54 words**

Installing the Software

Caution: Do not connect your camera to the PC until prompted.
1. Close all programs.
2. Insert the Whozee-Whatsits CD.

Sentence Rewritten

in Nortel Standard English

An Optivity Network Management System (ONMS) has a slow response time. This problem occurs on software versions V3.2.2, V3.2.2.2, V3.2.3 and V3.3 if the VLANs have two or more PP8600 agents. The cause of the problem is that the discovery process uses 100% of the CPU time.

Many of the Controlled English rules are broken in this small sample. For example, the original sentence has 47 words written in an awkward engineering-esque style. The measurements several thousand and excessive time are not exact. The complex verb comprising is easily replaced with the simple verb has.

The case for Controlled English: Which paragraph is easier to read and understand?

**Working With Source Content**

The need to document product functionality is rising, not just in English but in all languages. At the same time, the cost of this process is increasing, and users complain that information is hard to use. Most content, in fact, is never read. Those responsible for purchasing localization services complain about the cost and time for those services. Naturally, most of their efforts are directed at making localization as inexpensive, painless and fast as possible. They do this primarily by pressuring service providers to lower costs and by emphasizing reliance on software tools such as translation memory (TM) and machine translation (MT).

Ironically, the biggest factor in cost, quality, time and ease of localization — the source content itself — is usually ignored. The localization and translation firm ArchiText has developed ABREVE, an approach to content creation, internationalization and localization designed to reduce source text volume lower the costs of producing multilingual content; produce localization-ready content; streamline the content deployment process for smoother versioning and help content teams adopt a globalized approach. ABREVE is not a product or software. It is a structured way of processing content and preparing it for multilingual delivery at the conceptual, structural and terminological levels. The process combines specially developed writing and editing techniques with TM tools. This approach of analyzing, restructuring and rewriting content before it is ever localized reduces localization problems and expense. The system also addresses usability problems for all audiences by making content more consistent, more readable and above all shorter.

In addition, the system anticipates the requirements of computer-aided translation technologies by standardizing terminology, writing style and production values and supports a “write-once-use-many” strategy in all languages. ABREVE can be implemented directly during the authoring stage where writers and editors use the techniques to streamline, reduce and standardize their content before handing it off to localization providers. It can also be used as a consolidating edit pass immediately after content creation or on legacy materials prior to localization.

Taryn Light is content solutions manager at ArchiText. She can be reached at taryn@architext-usa.com
Avoiding a US-centric Writing Style

Laurie Kamerer

A bank in China recently purchased 400 copies of a software package from Cisco Systems, Inc. Neither the software nor the associated documentation had been localized, but bank management was not worried since “everyone speaks English.” Unfortunately, the bank’s personnel did not speak the long-winded, US-centric brand of English that appeared on the online help system. As a result, the CDs sit on the shelf while customers complain.

In a perfect world, all of our products, Web sites, documentation and marketing collateral would be localized for every target locale. In reality, customers often have to make do with the English versions. In either case, writers play a crucial role in serving global customers. One of the biggest contributions that content creators can make to their global audience is to eliminate US-centric references and biases.

Translations can be completed more efficiently and with fewer errors when their source materials are culturally neutral. When end customers must grapple with the English themselves, eliminating cultural bias becomes even more critical. Creating culturally neutral and therefore more comprehensible material hinges on two principles: avoiding culture-specific references and avoiding location-specific references.

Principle 1: Avoid culture-specific references. This kind of reference, which assumes the reader is familiar with American idiosyncrasies and customs, can even confuse native English speakers from outside the United States. Sports metaphors all too frequently creep into US business parlance and bewilder non-US speakers of English. Puns, jokes, idiomatic language, colloquialisms and jargon all fall into this category.

In the following example, the simile assumes that the audience is familiar with the American cultural landscape: “The Economy is very much like Oklahoma just after the land rush. The land closest to the border has been grubstaked, and many of the most convenient and conspicuously valuable lots have been fenced to keep interlopers out” (marketing material from a Cisco Systems, Inc., Web site).

Sports metaphors, especially baseball metaphors, should be eliminated at every occurrence. Not only do sports generally play a lesser role in other countries than they do in the United States, but baseball specifically (often cited as the pinnacle of Americanism) is especially unfamiliar to many non-US readers. The following statement, overheard at a sales meeting, might baffle attendees from outside the United States: “It’s great that our sales team made a diving catch on this one, but next time we should develop a game plan that does not necessitate such ninth-inning heroics.”

Colloquialisms can trip up even the best translators. Some of George W. Bush’s cowboy westernisms have made translators at international media outlets scramble. As reported in a recent National Public Radio piece, Bush stumped the foreign press with his recent challenge to Iraqi attackers. “Bring ‘em on,” he said. The Kyoto news agency in Japan opted to translate this as follows: “Come on. If you’re courageous enough to attack us, just attack us. We are ready to defeat you.”

After struggling with translating “Bring ‘em on,” the Arab news agency Al Jazeera chose not to quote the president at all, but instead to paraphrase. Speeches and presentations can be especially daunting for non-US speakers of English. In addition to understanding English, the audience also has to keep up with the speaker. If audience members receive slides or an outline in advance, they will be able to better focus on and comprehend the content.

Principle 2: Avoid location-specific references. Things that are not standard internationally, but vary based on the reader’s geographic frame of reference, can be considered “location-specific.” Common culprits in this category are time and date references, units of measure and references to specific laws and tax codes.

CNN reported on one particularly expensive example of this type of problem in 1999. NASA had lost a $125-million Mars orbiter because a Lockheed Martin engineering team used English units of measurement while the agency’s team used the more conventional metric system for a key spacecraft operation.

While time and date formatting might be obvious examples of location-specific considerations, a domestic reference like this might not immediately raise a red flag: “Customer support representatives are available 8 a.m. - 5 p.m. every day except national holidays” (Contact page from e-commerce Web site).

In addition to “What time zone?” the reader will have to ask himself “Whose nation? What holidays?”

In some cases, these types of references not only confuse readers, but can be much more insidious. One software vendor thought that the company would be able to “globalize” fairly easily by translating on-line marketing materials for its target market in Europe. The software enabled the automation of a number of human resources functions, including Web-based processing of 401(k) and W2 forms. The marketing content had gone through initial translations when one editor, based in Europe, asked, “What is 401(k)?” Not only did the marketing materials fail to speak to the target audience, but the functionality did not speak to their national tax and pension codes.

A British comedian also touched on this principle when he asked a retired British judge whether, when charged with a particular crime, he should plead the fifth. “That won’t do you any good,” the judge responded. “The fifth amendment is a particular crime, he should plead the fifth. “That won’t do you any good,” the judge responded. “The fifth amendment is part of the American Constitution and has no legal recognition in the UK.”

The application of these guidelines must vary depending on the nature of your content. Marketing material is not always suited to a perfectly literal style, whereas technical documentation is best if it is dry and unadorned. In any case, writers won’t leave their global audience stranded on second base if they consider these guidelines when developing content.
### A Writing Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Writing objective</th>
<th>Suggestions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Follow good practices</td>
<td>Write clearly. Use simple sentence structures.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Limit the number of nouns that qualify a noun.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Repeat nouns instead of using backward-pointing pronouns.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Put phrases as close as possible to the nouns that they modify.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Avoid an informal style.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Separate subordinate phrases and clauses from the main clause by commas.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Hyphenate word phrases that modify or qualify other words.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Always use commas correctly in coordinate phrases and clauses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Optimize translation output</td>
<td>Use an article or a descriptor to clarify the part of speech of a word.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Include relative pronouns even when they are not required.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Write list items as complete clauses or complete sentences.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Include the article in lists of nouns or noun phrases.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Minimize ambiguity. Avoid homographs.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Use words with their primary dictionary meaning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Use recommended formatting</td>
<td>Always use commas correctly in coordinate phrases and clauses.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Add two spaces after a full stop or a colon. Add one space after a comma or semicolon.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use a combination of punctuation, capitalization and font to identify a name such as an object name or a function.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Do not use a dash (—) as a punctuation mark.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Avoid using a slash (/) for alternate values.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Use parentheses sparingly and only when the enclosed material is independent of the meaning for the sentence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploit product features</td>
<td>Tag text that should not be translated.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This checklist was developed by Susan Harkus in 2000 and is based on insights gained from articles by F. Klein, H. McGregor and P. Ring published in *keyword, A journal for technical and scientific communicators*, Vol. 7, No. 2, June 1997. Used by permission.
This supplement introduces you to the magazine MultiLingual Computing & Technology. Published nine times a year, filled with news, technical developments and language information, it is widely recognized as a useful and informative publication for people who are interested in the role of language, technology and translation in our twenty-first-century world.

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Making software ready for the international market requires more than just a good idea. How does an international developer prepare a product for multiple locales? Will the pictures and colors you select for a user interface in France be suitable for users in Brazil? Elements such as date and currency formats sound like simple components, but developers who ignore the many international variants find that their products may be unusable. You’ll find sound ideas and practical help in every issue.

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ABREVE®

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Better.

More and more client-side localization managers agree: What we need next is not more technology, but better processes and, above all, better content.

The ABREVE® program from ArchiText addresses exactly this issue by targeting three elements: increased content quality (usability), lower content volume, and optimal localization readiness.

Technology alone has not, and will not, achieve those goals.

Content usability depends on factors like clarity, consistency, accuracy, ease of use, and more. But technology cannot determine whether information is easy to understand, consistent, or simply wrong or unnecessary.

The ABREVE® program of services and training develops content that better meets global users’ information needs by combining best practices in content development with effective processes, localization expertise, proprietary techniques, and technology.

Content volume has a huge effect on usability. If users cannot find information because there are too many words, accuracy and ease of use are irrelevant. Word count is also the single biggest factor in localization costs.

ABREVE® targets word-count reduction through a series of proprietary steps, eliminating redundancies, simplifying language, and ending the domination of format over content.

Word-count reductions of 25–60% through ABREVE® services are routine, and those reductions translate directly into an improved return on investment in localization (see graph).

Today’s content development approaches are not generally designed to meet the challenges of localization. ABREVE® focuses on making content ready for its path through localization by removing obstacles (like inconsistent terminology), optimizing tool use (through more 100% matches), and anticipating downstream work (with optimized graphics and formatting).

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