



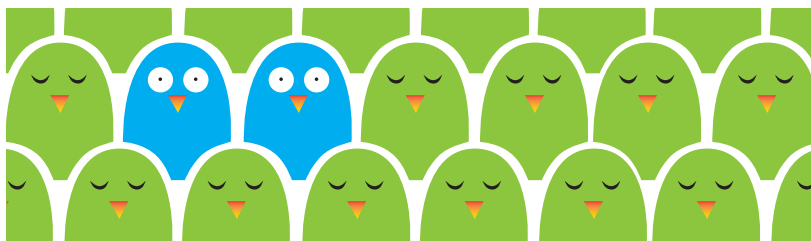
# NZTC International

## THE TRANSLATION CENTRE

## MULTILINGUAL WEBSITES – TRANSLATION TIPS AND TRAPS

by Hagen Issell

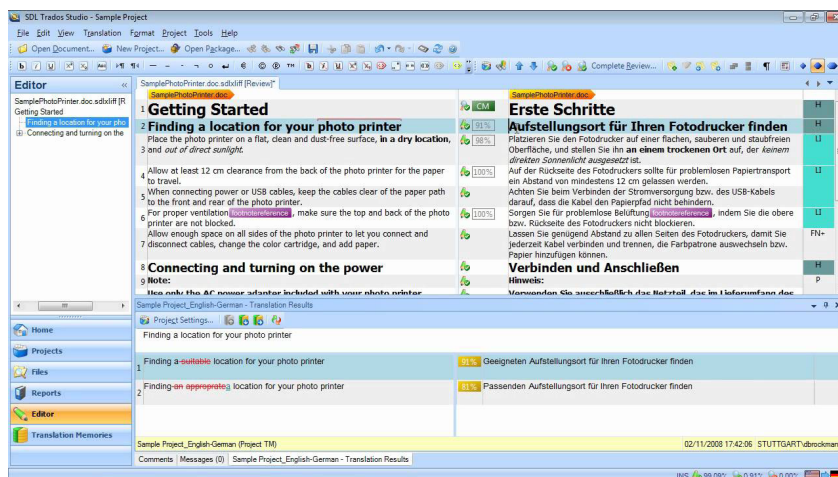
With increased globalisation and eye-opening statistics illustrating quite massive numbers of non-English-speaking internet users, it's no surprise that the number of companies developing multilingual websites is increasing rapidly. In this article we look at the latest approaches to translating websites and key considerations when planning a multilingual online presence.



### CONTENT MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

In 'the old days' translating a website required translators to edit 'static' HTML code directly, or provide translations to web developers to edit in HTML. These days most websites use 'content management systems' (CMS), which store your web page contents in databases and display pages automatically using pre-determined styles (often referred to as CSS). Popular CMS systems include WordPress, Joomla, Drupal, to name just a few.

These CMS systems enable content to be entered online using a content editing interface, and translations can also be entered online using the same interface as used for the original language. It's common for web developers and website owners to assume this is the best way for the website translation to be carried out. However, in order to translate content efficiently it's best for translators to work offline using the latest translation assistance tools (often call 'CAT' tools). These tools, such as NZTC's "SDL Trados" systems, enable translators to apply content repetition leverage, terminology management, advanced spell checking and assorted QA checking, in addition to ensuring that all translations are stored in an easily leveraged translation memory format for future re-use. If a translation is done directly in the website CMS, these tools can't be used, which can be a significant setback.

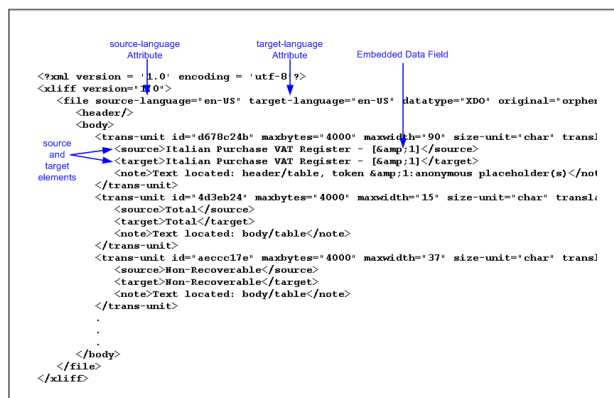


A screen shot from SDL Trados Studio, the most popular translation memory system for translators.

### CONTENT EXPORT/IMPORT

Most popular website CMS systems recognise the need to enable translation of content outside of the CMS and have features available (often called "Internationalisation modules") that allow your web page content to be exported in a format that can be processed by popular translation tools, then re-imported to your website in the same format following translation. These export/import formats are typically XML based, with XLIFF being a common interchange format for localisation. If you don't have such a content export/import feature, a common solution is manually copying content out of the website into a format that can be translated offline, then copying it back into the website after translation. However, that can be a very time-consuming affair!

If your website CMS doesn't offer this feature and you want to develop it, NZTC can advise you on how it can and should be structured, including providing XML schema examples that are ideal for the translation process.



An example of XLIFF code schema

## IN-CONTEXT TRANSLATION REVIEW

One of the implications of translating content outside of the website is that it can be more difficult for translators to see how the content looks when displayed on the actual web page. Factors such as the order of information or ideas on the page and the supporting graphics and images on the page can affect how the translation should be crafted for best results. Also, if the content is translated in an export format like XML and reimported following translation, it's important to ensure the all the page content has been translated and that this content displays correctly online. The solution for these issues is to: 1) Ensure translators are provided with as much context as possible, such as links to the original pages that they can reference when translating; and 2) Ensure that translated content is reviewed online in the final web pages by a native-speaker of the translated language. Step 2 can be done by the original translator, or other speakers, such as staff or distributors. If someone other than the original translator is reviewing the content online, bear in mind that they may come across contextual corrections and improvements when reviewing the page, which don't necessarily indicate the translation was poor, just that it could be improved once seen in the true context of the website.

## LANGUAGE FONT DISPLAY

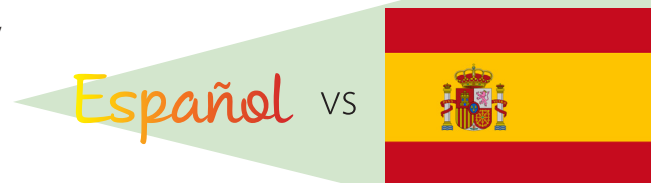
Another issue to consider when translating your website is whether it supports any special fonts or characters required to correctly display your desired languages. In most cases, provided "UTF8" font support is enabled, your CMS should support the display of most languages, provided correct language indicators are used to let the browser software know what language it should be displaying. Some languages work better with a specialist font in encoding specific to that language (such as Shift JIS for Japanese), so check with your language provider and they should be able to advise on this. The other issue to consider is whether your website style setup (such as CSS or display templates) enables you to change the font used on your translated versions of the website, as this can be required to support some special accented characters not available in some popular English font families.

## CULTURAL APPROPRIATENESS

In addition to ensuring your website is technically equipped to display foreign languages, it's also important to have your content reviewed, including the colours, images and icons used to ensure these are culturally appropriate and optimal for your target languages and markets. An experienced translation provider can usually offer a cultural assessment for you and build this into the translation process, to ensure your website content is correctly "localised", which means adapting content, images and units of measure etc. where needed, to suit regional and cultural differences.

Some languages tend to require more modifications than others. In particular, languages reading from right to left, such as Arabic, may require modification of your navigation structure and CSS to ensure the text flows correctly and the website looks natural to the target readers.

A common cultural gaffe is for multilingual websites to use flags to indicate a language version of a website, when in many cases the language will be spoken by many countries, and using one flag doesn't acknowledge this. The solution is to use the translation of the language name rather than flags. For example, you can use "Español" to indicate Spanish, whereas if you use the flag of Spain it would not be acceptable for all the Latin American Spanish-speaking countries.



## ONLINE CONTENT MANAGEMENT

Keeping content up to date can be a challenge for the original website language, but it's potentially an even bigger challenge when managing multiple language versions. Content management systems that have an 'internationalisation' function, such as that referred to earlier for content export and import, will often have a change-tracking feature built in that records when a change is made to a page in the primary source language (e.g. in the English version) and then automatically flags or triggers a process to export that page into a translation workflow that you can define. Such systems are typically worth their weight in gold and highly recommended if you have large websites and are managing multiple languages versions.

If you don't have such a system and you are manually managing your page updates, the translation updates can be managed quite efficiently if you are working with an experienced translation provider that employs Translation Memory systems (TM) such as the SDL Trados systems mentioned earlier. These systems record the original web page translations on a sentence by sentence basis, so when a web page is updated, these systems can tell which sentences have already been translated and which sentences are new, meaning you never pay for translating the same sentence twice.

## PROXY WEB PLATFORMS

A solution called a “Proxy Website” platform is growing in popularity in response to the increased demand for multilingual websites and to assist in the situation where the original website CMS may not provide an easy ‘internationalisation’ function. Proxy website platforms create a clone of the original website. This is hosted on a separate platform that supports easy content identification and extraction for translation and can display the content correctly once translated. To website visitors it looks like a normal translated version of the original website, but the platform is actually a separate 3rd party arrangement. Some systems available (at a price) include Smartling and Easyling. While having your own multilingual CMS is ideal, the Proxy systems are worth a look if you are having issues with multilingual site capability.

## MULTILINGUAL SEARCH ENGINE OPTIMISATION (SEO) AND ADVERTISING (SEA)

While search engines aren’t the only way to drive traffic to your website, they are arguably one of the most prevalent ways customers will find your online content. Therefore, to ensure your multilingual site versions can be found by target customers, you need to consider the same SEO issues that apply when optimising your website in its original language.

For example, you need to ensure ‘meta data’ such as page titles, keywords and descriptions are translated, and if you have a keyword optimisation strategy for specific pages on your site, you need to discuss these with your translation provider so they can be sure that keyword translation is well considered and usage on the chosen pages and throughout the whole site is consistent. To translate a search keyword list directly is better than nothing. However, because search behaviour tends to vary across languages and regions, the best method is to run popular keyword tests in Google and other sources to determine top related search terms specific to the language. Any native speaker can assist with this given the right guidance. NZTC can help advise you on how to approach multilingual SEO.

The issue of how to structure the domain and URL structure for your multilingual site versions can be a complex one: for example, whether you use top level domains such as [www.yoursite.kr](#) (for Korea) or use a sub domain setup like [www.kr.yoursite.com](#) or [www.yoursite.com/kr](#). Top level domains help your site look more ‘local’ to the visitor but can be more complicated to use when managing lots of different languages from the same content management system.

Google Adwords can be used just as effectively in your translated languages, though some special considerations include:

**Character restrictions:** The number of characters allowed in the headline, description lines and the Display URL is restricted, which can be very challenging in some languages that tend to use longer words than English (for example German). This requires translators to try to say the same thing with fewer characters and to carefully check for character overruns.

**Localised ad copy:** It’s particularly important that translation of AdWords copy is creative and not literal, which means you need to brief the translator carefully on what the ad is aiming to achieve and give them the freedom to alter the message as needed to make sense and work in the language. This process is called ‘Transcreation’ and you can expect to pay more per word for this service, given the extra time invested in crafting the foreign ad copy.

**Keyword variations:** When choosing and optimising keywords within ads there are a number of factors to consider including identifying and selecting possible spelling variations, broad matches, phrase matches, exact and negative matches. In addition, translators need to consider further foreign-language variations such as foreign accents, umlauts and synonyms not applicable in the English version.

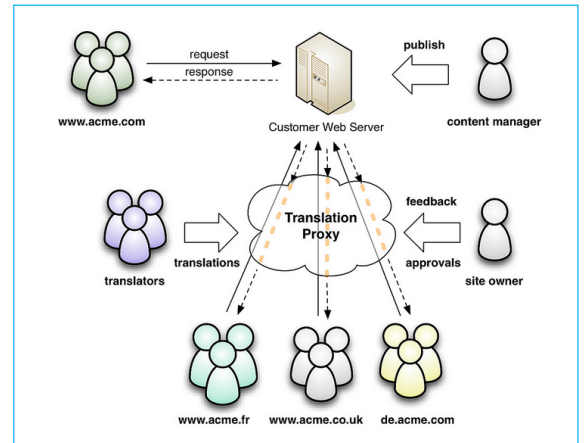
NZTC is experienced in AdWords setup in English and multiple languages, and can provide advice and AdWords assistance for customers or work with your existing SEO and/or SEA provider to implement your online marketing strategies in multiple languages.

## SUMMARY – BIG ISN’T ALWAYS BEST

As you can see, there are a lot of considerations when setting up a multilingual online presence and many ways to approach this and a lot of technology and advice available to assist.

One message we give to companies starting out is that it can be OK to take ‘small steps’. You don’t have to localise your whole website to engage with foreign language audiences – selecting just a handful of key pages from your site, or creating some summary pages, can be a cost-effective and quick way to get started tapping into the vast multilingual world online and all the opportunities this can bring.

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*This diagram by 'Smartling' shows a typical proxy web content flow.*