



Designing E-Learning for Translation

*Preparing e-learning
modules with translation
in mind can save clients
a lot of time and expense
down the line.*

Working with e-learning modules poses some special challenges for language service partners. Developers who prepare e-learning modules with translation in mind can avoid some of these challenges and save their clients a lot of time and expense down the line.

Many people assume that when interactive content is translated a translator simply looks at what's on the screen and recreates it in another language. Or that someone manually extracts the text and sends it to a translator and then inserts the translated text into the code. It is possible to do this, but this can cause all kinds of problems leading to unexpected expenses and delays.

For one thing, it is very likely that some content will be missing from the translation. It's so easy to miss some content, such as button labels or error messages. It's also difficult to be sure that you have viewed every possible screen, when the application includes many alternate answers, paths, etc.

And in the end someone else—possibly a higher paid someone—will have to spend the time reinserting the text into the file. Since this is also probably someone with computer rather than language skills, the opportunities for mistakes are enormous.

The better path is to have a translation service provider work with your code. This requires choosing the right authoring tools, providing a good design, and selecting a language service partner experienced in working with interactive applications.

Authoring Tools

The usually simple task of identifying and extracting the translatable content poses problems in e-learning and other software applications. An e-learning application generally contains numerous fields for titles, body text, buttons, questions and alternative answers, etc. All of this must be captured. In choosing e-learning development tools, developers should ask themselves how all this content will be identified and extracted for translation once the English version is complete .



Choosing the right tool is particularly important if there will be successive versions of the application, which is usually the case. Smooth integration with translation tools like a **translation memory** will ensure that the translator can focus on new and updated content, since the translation of unchanged content will already be available in the translation memory. Thus, translations of future versions will be quicker and cost less.

Developers of authoring software have begun to address this issue, and some now have translation modules available or translation utilities built in. With or without integrated translation utilities, many authoring tools create files from which sets of XML files can be generated and used for translation purposes. That's the good news, but not all authoring software is equal, so you should consult with a language service partner before choosing one of these options.

The bottom line: When you consider the pros and cons of any authoring tool, one thing to take into account is the possibility of translation and how this tool will interact with the translation process.

Writing

The basic guidelines set forth in our White Paper “**Tips on Writing for Translation**” apply to e-learning development as much as to any other document. Brevity and consistency in terminology are always particularly important.



Special Note: In designing e-learning applications, it may be especially tempting to use idiomatic language and culturally based examples to appeal to the users. This is understandable, but if you do this in a module destined for translation it will require more localization work as the translator seeks similar idioms or examples from the other culture.

Of course, it's not always possible to avoid all cultural references. In a technical training application, it may not be a problem. In sales or leadership training, on the other hand, the culture in which the trainees will use their skills is vitally important to their training. That is why one of the first steps in the localization process involves a readiness/feasibility analysis that focuses on an assessment of the cultural correctness of the training module. (See our white paper “**Cultural Adaptation of E-learning.**”)



Click here

*Apply text labels
to graphics in the
authoring program and
enlarge the text box to
allow for text expansion
in translation.*

Graphics

Even with the proper authoring tool, any text embedded in a graphic will be missing. However, text in graphics still has to be located and translated; then the graphics must be recreated with the translated text, and the new graphics must be reinserted in the module. All this means more work and expense.

If you can avoid it, don't use graphics with text embedded in them; instead, add labels to the graphics directly in the authoring program.

Most importantly, avoid graphics that are culturally bound. Pictures of people should be as generic as possible. Graphics that rely on cultural references should be eliminated. For example, you might normally use a baseball or football graphic to illustrate a concept for an American audience, but the graphic may have no meaning in many other countries. As noted above, in some types of training cultural references may be important. If the local culture is important to the training, then you or your client will have to plan for a substantial **"transcreation"** of the module for the different localities being targeted.

You should also review our white paper **"Tips on Graphic Design for Translation"** for further guidelines.

White
space
is your
FRIEND

White Space

When text is translated into other languages, the final product can be significantly longer than the English version. When English text is translated into any of the major European languages, it typically expands by 30 percent. This can even be a problem with single words. For example, your “Search” button in English becomes your “Recherche” button in French.

Be sure to leave plenty of white space in your design to accommodate longer lines of text and longer paragraphs. Enlarge text boxes—even boxes for things like titles, buttons, and graphic labels—to allow for text expansion.

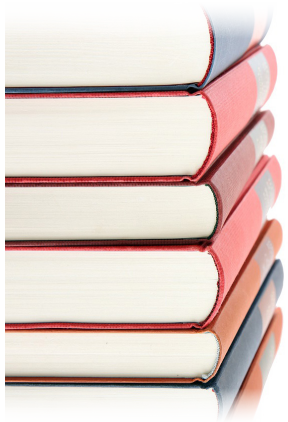
Preparation

The possibility of translation is something that should be on all developers’ radar screens, and they should also be aware that not all translators are really prepared to handle such a translation job.

No matter how carefully you plan, working with content extracted from a software application may present some unexpected challenges. A translator with no technical expertise will not be able to help in overcoming many problems. Despite the fact that there are software tools especially for translating file types like HTML and XML, many translators do not know how to use them well.

Before you even get started with your design, talk to a language service partner who has experience with software localization. They can familiarize you with the translation process, help you choose an authoring tool, and help you avoid common pitfalls in the process.





Further Reading

“Tips on Writing for Translation,” MTM LinguaSoft White Paper

“Tips on Graphic Design for Translation,” MTM LinguaSoft White Paper

Hans Fenstermacher, “Closing the Content Gap,” Intercom, May 2007

Checklist for Designing E-learning for Translation

- Authoring Tool:** In choosing your authoring tool, have you determined how content requiring translation can be generated in a form that translators can work with?
- Culturally Bound Content:** Have you avoided the use of idioms and of examples that are culturally bound, where possible? Have you avoided culturally bound graphics, e.g., graphics that depict national symbols or sports, photos of people from identifiable cultures or ethnic groups? If this is not possible, have you or your client planned for extra time and budget to re-create the content for the cultures you are targeting?
- Text in Graphics:** Have you avoided using graphics with embedded text? Can you provide native files with the text layers intact for any graphics with embedded text?
- White Space:** Have you left plenty of white space to allow for text expansion, including enlarging text boxes, labels, buttons, etc.
- Testing:** Have you or your client planned for testing the localized applications?
- Consultation:** Have you consulted with an experienced translation/localization provider before beginning projects that may need to be translated?

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