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THE MAGAZINE OF THE SOCIETY FOR TECHNICAL COMMUNICATION

September/October 2009

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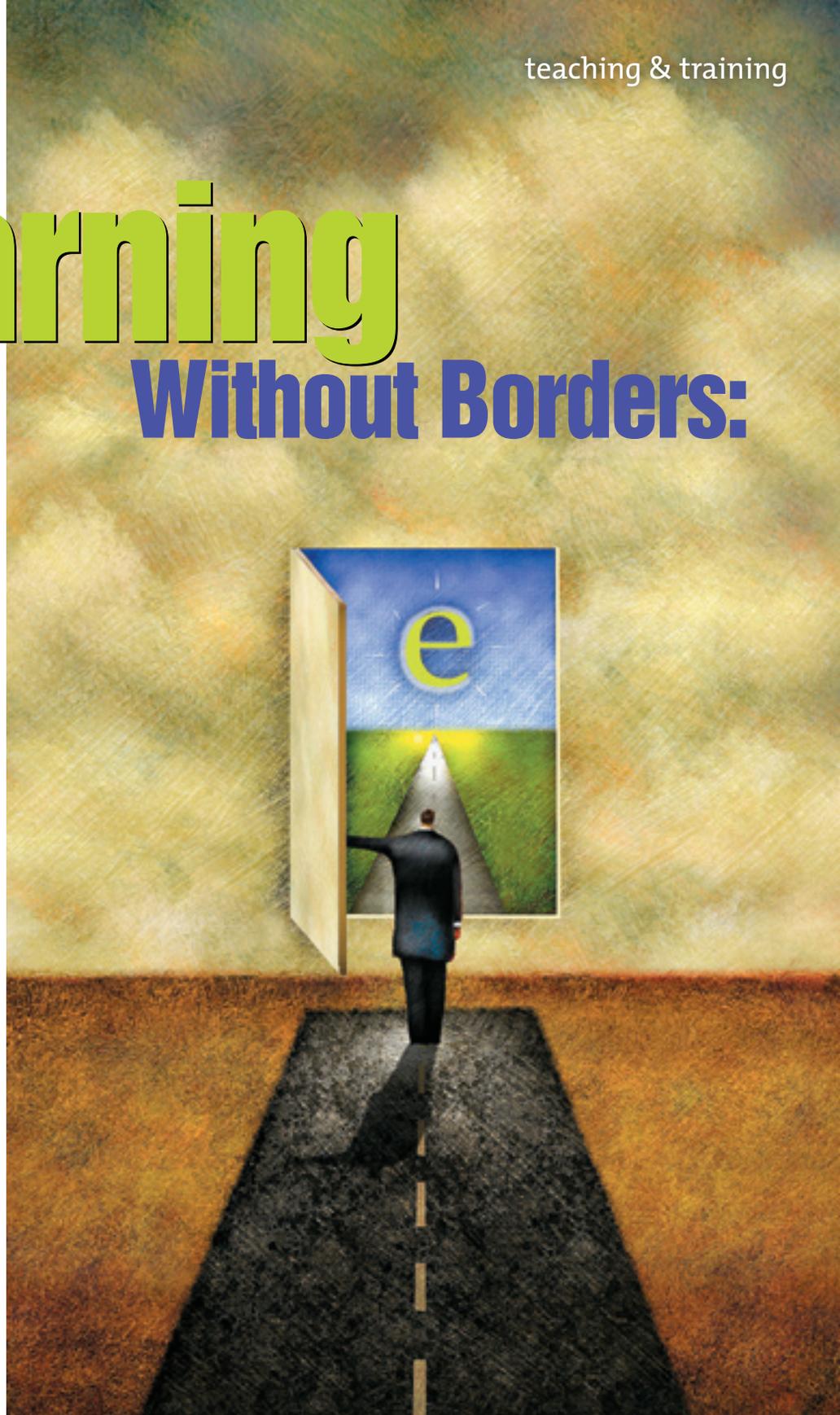
BY MYRIAM SIFTAR, *Member*

As more and more companies are discovering, e-learning is a great way to train groups of employees or product users who are geographically dispersed. With businesses setting up operations across the globe and moving their products into foreign markets, trainees may very well include people whose native language is not English. It is becoming much more likely that an e-learning module will have to be translated into another language or languages.

Working with e-learning modules poses some special challenges for language service providers. 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. Some basic knowledge about how translators work can help a developer to design e-learning applications in ways that facilitate a smooth translation process.

The Translation Process

Many people assume that interactive content is translated simply by having a translator look at what's on the screen and translate it, followed by someone else who inserts the translated text into the code. It is possible to proceed this way, and it may seem like the cheapest option, but there can be all kinds of problems leading to unexpected expenses and delays. Suddenly, the cheapest option is not cheap at all!



Tips for Designing E-learning Modules with Translation in Mind

For one thing, it is very likely that some content will be missing from the translation. This could occur for a number of reasons:

- It is very easy to miss some content on the screen, such as buttons, feedback messages, and other user interface elements.
- It is very difficult to be sure that you have viewed every possible screen when the application includes many alternate answers, paths, etc.
- Some content, such as error messages, will not show up on the screen unless a certain event occurs.

Another drawback is that quality control is difficult when a reviewer has to continually go back and forth between the source text and a separate translation, rather than being able to see both versions side by side in one file.

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

It is far more efficient and cost-effective if the translator can work from a single file into which the translator can directly insert the translation along with the original English. Therefore, the actual translation process implemented for this kind of work might look like the following:

First, all of the content that needs to be translated must be identified, extracted, and put into a file format that the translator can work with.

If the e-learning application is of any length and complexity—and especially if it involves a lot of technical terminology—the language service provider will want to prepare a multilingual glossary of important terms that are used repeatedly in the application. The translator can load the glossary into a translation memory for later use.

Next comes the actual translation. The translator creates a bilingual file—showing both the original text and the translation—which is then checked by a proofreader. Ideally, the translator will also use translation memory (TM) soft-

ware that, as its name implies, actually memorizes what has already been translated. The TM can compare later content to earlier content to see whether a translation already exists. TM software ensures consistency of usage throughout a translation and across translations of related materials. TM can also save money because the same text does not have to be translated over and over.

The translator will also want to be able to apply spell- and grammar-checking utilities to the translated content. The proofreader, in turn, should be able to mark the changes in the file, using a utility like Microsoft Word's Track Changes, so that those changes can be reviewed during a quality check.

Finally, the translated material is automatically reinserted into the e-learning module, retaining all the original text formatting, hyperlinks, coding, etc.

So what are the implications of this process for e-learning developers? We'll look at three aspects of the development process: 1) choice of development tools, 2) design, and 3) writing content.

Choice of 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, page 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.

Developers of authoring software have begun to address this issue. Two of the major tools, ToolBook (from SumTotal) and Lectora (Trivantis), have come out with translation modules, but they differ dramatically in how they operate. The ToolBook Translation System (TTS) exports the translatable content to Microsoft Access databases, which the translator then reads using special software. The software presents the translatable elements individually to the translator with a space to fill in the translation. The translation is saved

to a second, translated database, which is then integrated with the e-learning module by the author.

The Lectora system, on the other hand, exports all the translatable elements to a rich text file (RTF) that the translator can work with in any common word processing program. The translated RTF can simply be reimported by the author to create the new language version.

Strictly from the point of view of translation, the Lectora system has many advantages. The RTF file works with TM software, allows the use of spell-check and grammar utilities, and allows for a proofreader or other reviewer to mark edits using utilities such as Track Changes. TTS, in contrast, requires special software and does not allow the use of a translation memory or other utilities. (Certainly there are ways to extract the data from the Access databases that TTS creates and to manipulate it in other programs, but this requires a lot more preparation, thought, and technical skill on the part of the language service provider.)

These are only two of the many authoring tools out there. Many have no special utilities for translation or simply advise you to export an XML file. (Exports to one or many XML files do provide the necessary elements for a workable and successful translation process, if your language service provider knows how to handle them.)

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

Writing

The basic rule in writing for translation is to keep it simple: 1) avoid subordinate clauses, 2) use the active voice, and 3) be consistent in your choice of terminology by using the same words and phrases to express a concept throughout the document. In creative writing, you may make heavy use of a thesaurus. In technical writing, clarity is more important. And, in writing for translation, clarity is essential. Ambiguity is possibly the most difficult problem for translators. Brevity is also a virtue. Not

only is brevity a key to simplicity, but it also keeps expenses down, as language service providers typically charge by the word.

Previous articles in *Intercom* provide more detailed and invaluable suggestions for writing for translation (included in the Suggested Reading at the end of this article). These guidelines are as important for e-learning content as they are for any content.

Design

Graphics

Any text in a graphic must be translated. The graphic also must be recreated with the translated text and the new graphic has to be reinserted in the module. If you can avoid it, don't use graphics with text; add any text directly in the authoring program. When the use of text in a graphic cannot be avoided, make sure that the graphic is available in a form in which the text can be edited, as a layered Photoshop file, Excel spreadsheet, etc. Supply those files to the language service provider along with the export of the text. (*Note:* Some tools come with prepared graphics for common elements such as buttons. If they have text, don't use them. Make your own.)

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 use a baseball or football graphic to illustrate a concept for an American audience, but the graphic may have no meaning in another country.

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. Open up text boxes—

even boxes for things like titles, buttons, and graphic labels—to allow for text expansion.

Planning Ahead

When the time comes for a translation project—or even when you are just looking for planning advice—it's best to choose a language service provider who has experience with this type of content. The provider should also have the technical knowledge to adapt the approach to various development environments.

No matter how careful the planning, 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 overcome many problems. In fact, despite the fact that there are software tools especially for translating code like HTML and XML, many translators do not know how to use them. Since many e-learning development tools produce a Flash file, an XML ex-

port is often the easiest way to extract the text for translation.

The possibility of translation is something that should be on every developer's radar. Whether or not your clients are planning translation from the beginning, talk to them about their future plans. They'll be happy to know that you are thinking ahead. **i**

SUGGESTED READING

Fenstermacher, Hans. "Closing the Content Gap." *Intercom* (May 2007): 6–9.

Rushanan, Valerie. "Editing for International Audiences." *Intercom* (December 2007): 16–19.

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