



# Localizing eLearning Systems and Websites

Goals, Practices and Problems for Managers  
of XML Localization Projects

## A Manager's Guide from Voiance Language Services

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## Summary

Your website and eLearning courses are catching on. Users are consuming your text, audio-video and media, doing their jobs better, and interacting with you constantly. You've stepped up your efforts to keep the content useful, and the payoff you're seeing in employee productivity and customer engagement is impressive.

Then comes the next big step:

***"You need to get the eLearning content or website translated."***

Most managers of eLearning and web projects are not ready for this. Are you?

- Are your content files ready for translation now and reintegration afterwards?
- Will your eLearning and website display characters in other languages properly?
- Are you familiar with terms like "translation glossary," "CDATA blocks," "XML parsing" and "translation memory tools"?
- Do you know what a translation project will require of you, your content teams, and your engineers?

This guide looks at the process of content translation (or "localization" – tailoring to the needs of a specific locale) from your perspective. Whether the target language is Spanish, French, Chinese, Hebrew or Pashto, translation projects can move through your organization on time and on budget, or late and over budget. By keeping this series of goals, practices, and ways to avoid problems in mind, you'll have the best chance of keeping your project on time and on budget.

Whether you are on your first translation project or your tenth, you'll find important lessons below. This guide is a collection of concepts and tactics that will help you manage your project, understand the world of translation services and explain what you need from your translation vendor and co-workers.

## General

Successful translation projects depend on preparation. The more translation-ready the website or eLearning application is in its original language, the easier it is for the project managers, translators, engineers and testers to deliver it in the target language.

## Understand the machinery of translation

Once a linguist translates a sentence, the source (e.g., English) and the translation (e.g., Spanish) are stored dictionary-style in a translation memory database, or TM. TMs match full sentences. Small differences in wording or formatting from one version of the content to the next result in the translation tool retrieving fuzzy matches as likely candidates for use. The greater the difference, the more the translator must massage the old content into something that works in the new context. At a certain point, the effort to fix the old translation is equal to or greater than the time required to translate the content from scratch.

Many file types include items such as formatting tags and code. The translation tool must parse the text for matches while preserving the tags, so it locks them to prevent translators from accidentally altering or deleting them, while exposing only the translatable text, as shown in Figure 1:

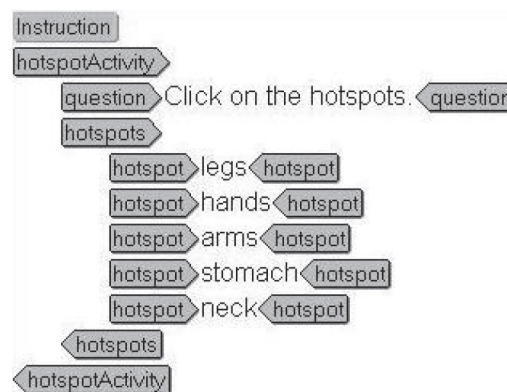


Figure 1 - Tags preserved and locked in translation tool

While it is easy to tell the tool how to parse certain file types for translatable text – “look for anything between quotation marks” or “take any text between an equal sign and the end of the line” – it is also easy to confuse the tool, especially when using inline tags such as bold, italics and underline for simple formatting. Even minor differences in formatting can prevent the translation tool from recognizing previously translated text. For example, in the middle of an XML project, translation tool will likely consider each of these as unique:

```
CONTENT_STRING_1 = Press <b>OK</b> to continue.  
CONTENT_STRING_1 = Press <B>OK</B> to continue.  
CONTENT_STRING_1 = <b>Press OK to continue</b>.
```

If the original sentence read:

```
CONTENT_STRING_1 = Press OK to continue.
```

then the tool will not recognize a 100% match with any of the above examples, even though the changes only relate to formatting or punctuation.

### Goals

Ensure that your vendor has the proper tools to lock all functional code and tags so that translators can see them but cannot accidentally change them. Keep original text and its corresponding translations stable so that the project accumulates a database of translated text (“segments”) and can continue to take advantage of previous translations.

### Practices

Under ideal conditions, translation tools perform this parsing automatically and expose only text. To automate as much of the work as possible, keep translatable text separate from formatting tags in the project files.

### Problem Avoided

You can expect that a vendor working on projects as extensive as eLearning and websites can suggest improvements or set up a process that automates file preparation as much as possible.

## Assets

### Gather all project files

XML-based eLearning projects and websites contain a wide variety of components: text files, graphics, audio, and video. Gathering all of these files for handoff can be difficult – especially the first time – but it’s cheap insurance against the most common delays that affect translation projects.

Localization vendors need all of the files used to create the original eLearning content to do their jobs properly:

- source files for all graphic elements (e.g., Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Flash source files) because only these are easily translatable
- source content in the authoring format, which is easier to translate than the compiled output
- a complete and functional run environment for proper QA of the translations.

### Goals

All of the translatable content should be in identifiable locations in your directory structures and labeled within your content-bearing files. In the case of graphic elements containing text, the text itself should be accessible. The source files for graphics should reside in special directories named in accordance with the output files they are used to create.

### Practices

Ask the engineers and designers to create a map indicating the files with translatable text. This may be the first time anybody realizes how scattered the text is and in how many different file formats the text resides. To make handoff easy on the next project, consider storing the text in similarly named files or directories.

If your engineers don’t have bandwidth or you have received the completed courseware from a third-party developer, your translation vendor can help. Be sure to give your vendor extra time to reverse-engineer the package to isolate the translatable content.

Consider building SCORM (Sharable Content Object Reference Model) compliance into the original-language project so that handoff and hand-back conform to the identical structure and requirements of the eLearning platform.

**Problem Avoided**

Poorly structured, wildly heterogeneous files (e.g., combinations of TXT, HTML, XML, DOC, PPT) in a project can add hours of unnecessary production effort to your translation costs. Variety in file types introduces many variables that slow down the file processing that takes place before translation and the QA process that cleans and integrates the files after translation.

**Text files**

Most website and eLearning content is text in pages and screens. Authoring systems, eLearning platforms, and editing software generate the text and store it in the project, usually in plainly readable format.

**Establish consistent terminology**

Many projects consist of content and material pulled in from different sources, audiences and vocabularies. While these differences make for rich eLearning, they can also slow translators down. For example, a project for a telecommunications company might use terms as varied as "cell phone," "mobile phone," "handheld device" and "wireless device" interchangeably to describe the same object.

**Goals**

Standardize consistent terms that mean the same thing throughout the project. Make sure that designers, developers and writers describe concepts with the same words in all occurrences.

**Practices**

Edit and normalize source text. Create a glossary of the most important vertical terms in your content and enforce it throughout the project. Preserve older terms for older products as needed. Glossary comments may refer to specific model numbers to which the terms apply as the example below illustrates:

Term	Context
cell phone	use in all customer-facing materials and content
mobile phone	do not use
handheld device	refers to tablets, PDAs, devices with a complex interactive touch screen display. Not interchangeable with "cell phone."

Be sure to provide this glossary to the translators and translate applicable terms in the glossary at the beginning of the project.

Also, consistent writing style can help lower translation costs. For example, as different groups create and combine documentation, some writers may favor a bulleted style and others a paragraph style. Even though a series of bullets may convey the same information as a paragraph of instruction, the similarity will be lost on the translation tool, which will not be able to reuse the translation. However, when writers can use the same style and text in multiple places, the translation tool can easily find and reuse the corresponding translation.

**Problem Avoided**

Circulate the glossary to ensure that it includes all the important project terms. Obtain approval (including changes and updates) for the translated version from reviewers who speak the target languages. Projects running without an approved translation glossary risk global, last-minute changes to fundamental terms. Approved glossaries help avoid these expensive changes and answers translators' questions preemptively so that they do not have to stop work to pose them.

**Standardize text file format**

Authoring systems support many different file formats such as XML, HTML, DOC and raw text. Translation tools also support these formats, but require a certain amount of manual intervention to prepare the files and ensure that the parsing rules are accurately identifying and isolating translatable text for that file format.

## Goals

Establish one file format for storing all translatable content.

## Practices

Identify all the areas of translatable information in the project. Clean up and, if necessary, convert files to ensure that everything that appears as text on screen is in a single file format. Enforce this requirement in the design phase of the eLearning or website project.

## Problem Avoided

When the vendor cannot identify translatable text efficiently and reliably because of a wide variety in file formats, the translation process becomes inefficient. It takes longer and costs more to prepare files for translation, recycle shared content among files, and reintegrate them to the project after translation. Standardized text file formats help mitigate this problem, especially during mid-project content updates.

## Embed external content carefully

Authors often recycle training material from a variety of sources into the text fields of their eLearning and web content. From a prior HTML-based training, for example, the authors may copy and paste bullets, comments, and graphics as eLearning content into text fields in the authoring tool. The tool will then wrap the pasted text in a CDATA block in order to store it as XML. Authoring tools and browsers tolerate the mix of content in CDATA blocks and display it correctly, but translation tools need to parse the raw text at a different level.

## Goals

Ensure that CDATA blocks inside XML are consistent with regard to in-line formatting, so parsers can accurately separate translatable and non-translatable text. For example:

```
<textItem id="popupTitle" translatable="yes"><![CDATA[Translation tools can easily parse text in CDATA blocks with standard HTML tags wrapping <b>bold</b> and <i>italic</i> words.]]></textItem>
```

```
<TextHtmlValue locid="1033">But the tools have trouble handling &lt;b>bold&lt;/b> both formatting and &lt;i>italic&lt;/i> words when XML character entities replace the HTML tags, which often happens outside of CDATA blocks.</TextHtmlValue>
```

Figure 1 shows consistently formatted and properly parsed CDATA blocks as they appear in the tools translators use:

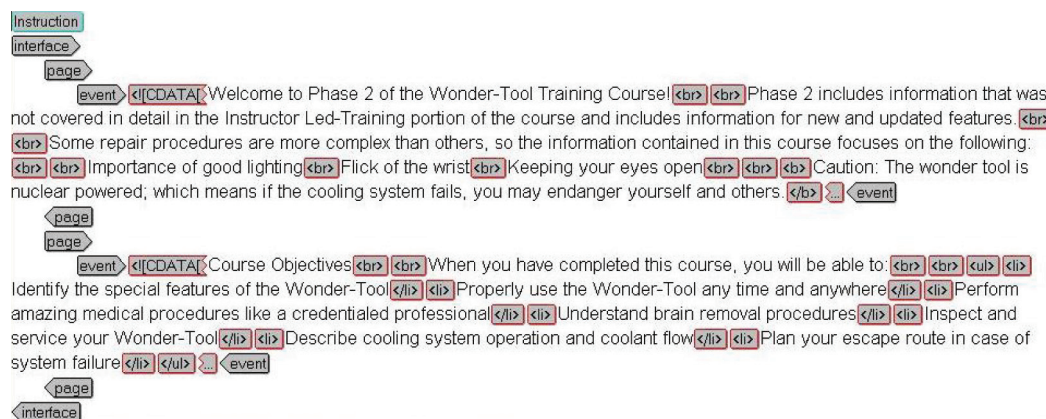


Figure 2 - Consistently formatted CDATA blocks

## Practices

Use embedded formatting carefully and consistently. If the authoring tool uses <b> and </b> to denote bold formatting and imported content uses <B> and </B>, standardize on lower-case tags throughout the project.

Some import or copy-and-paste operations outside of CDATA blocks convert statements like:

```
<b>OK</b>
```

to

```
&lt;b>OK&lt;/b>;
```

Convert symbol entities like &lt; into straight tagging like < in the CDATA blocks and ensure that these symbol entities are not used.

Different tools and file types encode and store special characters – à, é, í, ß, ©, – differently. The symbol ™, for example, exists in various character sets as:

- &#8482;
- &trade;
- \u2122
- %E2%84%A2

Because of the difficulty involved in accommodating multiple formats, it is best to go through the files and ensure they contain one consistent symbol format.

Merging content from other sources can result in too much variety in the CDATA blocks and make the characters difficult to parse consistently. Locating and correcting these sequences is easier at their source - the point at which designers and writers place the content in the authoring tool.

#### Problem Avoided

Too much variety in tags and formatting (bold, underline, italics, span-tags) in CDATA-wrapped material can result in expense and delay because the vendor must manually hunt for and standardize these sequences all over the project. Non-standardized elements in CDATA blocks expose non-translatable elements and text to translators and increase the risk of corruption. If these elements are not cleaned up, they can result in inflated word count and cost overruns.

## Label translatable content consistently in XML

Standards like XML and HTML include conventions for indicating translatable text. The easier it is for the vendor to find translatable text inside the file consistently, the more the vendor will be able to rely on automated tools for file preparation, translation and QA.

#### Goals

Define XML tags and attributes so the designer, vendor, and translation tools can easily find translatable text.

Post-translation QA works smoother on files with consistent syntax. Automated QA tools are similar to translation tools in that they require manual programming to handle exceptions. The fewer the exceptions, the shorter the setup time and the quicker the work of QA proceeds.

#### Practices

Arrive at and enforce an internal syntax for marking all translatable text in the files.

Anything translatable should have a consistent distinguishing element or attribute label, like locid or a unique prefix or suffix, to make the text easy to find. Although there is no universally recognized standard for denoting translatable text, XML is extensible enough to permit the use of a consistent attribute such as locid= or translatable= within the project. Other examples include:

```
<string name="update_label" translatable="yes">There was an error processing your request.</string>

    name      = "IDS_STRING_CONTINUE",
    locid     = 1033,
    data      = UTF16_EncString("Click here to continue"),
```

It is also helpful to use the same label, or easily identifiable variations, wherever you have translatable content throughout your files, as indicated below:

- for a tag name whenever text is enclosed within a simple element `<TextItem>Lorem ipso</TextItem>`
- to label translatable CDATA blocks `<TextItem>[CDATA[Lorem ipso]]</TextItem>`
- as attribute names whenever attribute values are translatable `<update_label="My Latin quote" DisplayString="Lorem ipso">`

#### **Problem Avoided**

The more variations you use to denote translatable content, the more custom or manual parsing the vendor will have to perform.

### Separate content from formatting

As noted above, formatting within translatable text can introduce a big variable, making the text difficult to identify, decreasing the likelihood of reuse and requiring manual intervention and cleanup. For global companies that translate constantly, it may be preferable to separate content from formatting altogether.

#### **Goals**

To help the translation tools find and reuse already translated text, XML elements should contain only text and should not be paired with inline formatting. For example, a translation tool will not see the following two lines as a 100% match:

```
<string name="upgrade_tile">"A new version of this module is available."</string>
```

and

```
<string name="upgrade_tile">"A new version of <b>this module</b> is available."</string>
```

Even though the two lines are essentially the same, the bold tags in the second example are used to provide emphasis – the visual equivalent of a shout. In terms of messaging, a phrase spoken and a phrase shouted aren't equivalent, which is why the translation tool may flag the bold phrase as different.

Marrying the text to the inline formatting introduces a new variable to the parsing process, reducing the chance of translation reuse through matching.

#### **Practices**

When building eLearning content, authors should not arbitrarily use formatting tags. Set and enforce a rule of keeping formatting outside of the translatable text so that the parsing process deals only with text changes, instead of a potential combination of text and formatting changes. If they are used to denote key terms or concepts, apply them consistently and keep the variations to a minimum.

#### **Problem Avoided**

When authors and writers modify inline formatting during updates, it can impair the ability of the translation tools to recycle previous translations.

### Patch hard line breaks

Many authoring tools provide utilities for exporting web and eLearning text to external files. However, the tools may store and export the text with hard line breaks in the middle of a segment. Browsers and eLearning players usually ignore these line breaks and display text normally, but the breaks exist at the file-level and cause parsing problems with translation tools.

When the breaks occur in mid-sentence, the tool interprets them as standalone fragments, fails to find their 100% matches in already translated text, and inaccurately adds them to the "to-be-translated" word count. Later on, these fragments may not come together properly in the matching process. For example, the authoring tool might export the single sentence, like this:

```
Base station latitude in units of 0.25 second, expressed as a two's complement signed number,  
with positive numbers signifying north latitudes.
```

in three separate pieces (where ¶ represents a hard line break):

```
Base station latitude in units of 0.25 second, expressed ¶  
as a two's complement signed number, with positive numbers ¶  
signifying north latitudes. ¶
```



These hard line breaks are especially prevalent in programming code samples, where coding specifications dictate a maximum number of characters per line.

#### Goals

Find and remove the hard line breaks before handing off files to the translation vendor, or ensure that text is stored without them in the first place.

#### Practices

Some tools have functionality to turn off the addition of hard-coded line breaks. In worst-case scenarios, you or your translation vendor can use search-and-replace tools or Perl scripts with regular expressions to identify and patch translatable text fractured by hard line breaks. Any additional filtering or manipulation by the vendor may add time and cost.

#### Problem Avoided

Hard line breaks can make it impossible for the translation tools to recognize previously translated segments, leading to higher costs. Writers and designers may be confident that 90% of the content is unchanged since the previous translation, but hard breaks – especially those that move from one version to the next – may make it appear that only 60% of the content is unchanged.

## Graphic files – Static

This category includes content such as navigation bars, controls and buttons.

### Externalize translatable text

These assets live on Websites and in eLearning systems as object files (JPEG, GIF, PNG, etc.), and are often “flattened,” or compressed. Translating them properly requires either the source files used to create these compressed versions or versions that have the text accessible. With the source files, the vendor can place translated text in the graphic as a separate layer without disturbing the colors and image behind the text.

#### Goals

Export text from source graphic files to XML files that reside among all of the other XML content in the project. If this is not practical, then make the translatable text accessible on a separate layer in the source graphic file.

#### Practices

Store the project files generated when the original graphic was designed; for example, the entire project for Adobe Photoshop PSD or Fireworks PNG graphics. (Note that some eLearning authoring tools provide already translated versions of these graphics, especially for navigation interfaces.)

Long-term design alternatives include:

- callouts in boxes populated with XML-based text (see Figure 1). The graphic itself contains no translatable text; instead, the text resides on the periphery of the graphic, called out with lines. The authoring tool associates the position of each line with a unique XML element that contains the text.

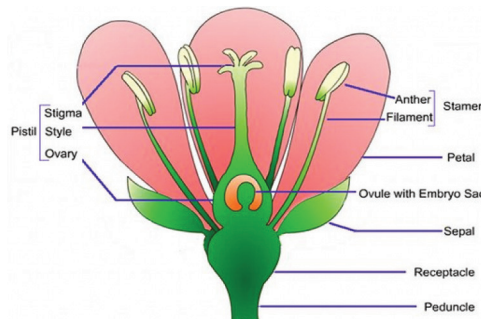


Figure 3 - Image labels called out with lines

- numbered items in the graphic, with an accompanying legend in a table (see Figure 2). In this structure, translatable text for the graphic resides in the main body text. No translation of graphic files is necessary.

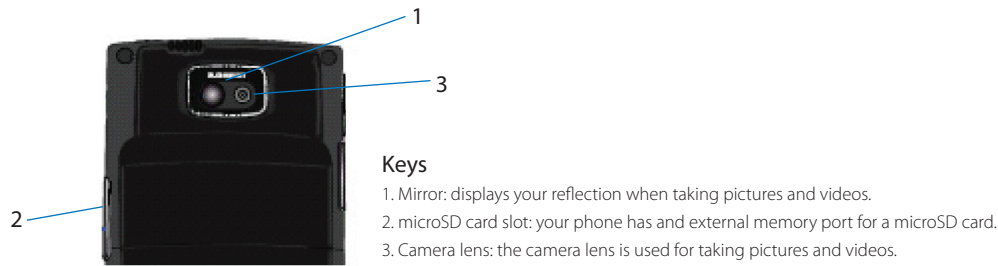


Figure 4 - Image labels called out with numbers

#### Problem Avoided

If all you hand off is the object version (e.g., JPEG, GIF, PNG, PDF) of the graphic, the vendor may charge for time and effort required to recreate the source files from scratch or to force the translation into a copy of the compressed file (usually with unsatisfactory results). Also, when graphics change, retranslation will be necessary.

#### Prepare for text expansion

Translation causes text to expand. Many languages require additional words to specify number, gender and part of speech, causing exact translations to be longer than the original. Each language has a different average expansion rate: Spanish translations average 150% of the length of the English original, and Greek can be close to 200%. For example:

English: Mix one quart of tap water

Spanish : Mezcle un cuarto de galón de agua de la llave

On a digital or printed page, designers can leave and rearrange white space to avoid the appearance of crowding, but graphics are usually space-constrained.

If button sizes are set to static dimensions in the original graphics, then translated text is likely to be truncated and the translator may have to use unconventional abbreviations.

#### Goals

Reduce crowding in translated graphics by separating text from graphics as much as possible, as described in “Externalize translatable text” above.

#### Practices

Design white space around text-rich areas in graphics. Cost-conscious eLearning designers work out ways to minimize the use of text in their graphical elements.

#### Problem Avoided

Without additional breathing room, translated text in graphics may be hard to read, especially when translated into Asian languages. Muddy translations in graphics suggest that the vendor did not use the source files or did not understand how to save the translated versions properly. Small, cramped text indicates that the designers did not reserve enough space for expansion. Translators can use abbreviations, but eLearning users and Website visitors do not usually receive these well.

## Graphic files – Motion

This category includes movies, video and the Flash category of animated graphics.

#### Externalize translatable text

These assets are available to end-users as compiled object files (MOV, WMV, etc.) ready to launch in a player in a variety of sizes, frame rates, and resolutions. To translate these properly, the vendor must start with the source project used to generate the object file, then replace the subtitles with translated text or overdub audio in a separate layer.

### Goals

Export subtitle text from source video project files to XML files that reside among all of the other XML content in the project. Some video production software packages store subtitle data already in XML format, which editors can easily translate and drop back into the video project with immediate results. If this is not practical, then make the translatable text accessible on a separate layer in the source video project file.

### Practices

- Flash – Store text in a separate layer in the source .fla file. A better long-term strategy is to link translatable text to dynamic text fields in your .fla files from external XML files and store it with the rest of the project files.
- Video – Deliver entire source video project with source files for every graphic used in titles, subtitles and on-screen text. This is a smooth process when the producer of the video can save text as XML elements external to the graphics.

Because subtitle text itself can be white, designers should plan video so that some part of the visible screen displays one end or the other of the contrast spectrum and text shows up clearly on it.

### Problem Avoided

The best way to avoid problems in translating video is to hand off the source project in its entirety to the vendor. This is often a matter of archiving or exporting the project to multiple DVDs, but the vendor will need everything used to produce the original in order to integrate the translation.

Use caution when embedding graphics files inside other graphics files (e.g., designer pastes static JPEG file into a Flash project). The vendor will have to go through every graphic and manually copy/paste the text out of and back into every Flash project. This can be prohibitively expensive, especially when translating into multiple languages.

## Audio files

Audio content includes the dialog, narration on video, voiceover and embedded sound files (e.g., MP3, AIFF, WMV) common to eLearning projects and rich media.

### Treat translation process like creation of original

Translating audio is nearly as labor-intensive and time-consuming as creating the original audio. However, because of the added obstacle of scheduling voice talent in the target language, audio can be even more expensive to redo.

### Goals

Ensure that the target-language audio track is correct and of absolutely final quality the first time it is recorded.

Begin working with the audio content as early as possible. The translation process requires obtaining the original scripts and translating them to conform to on-screen content. Customers should approve translated scripts and voice talent with trusted, in-country reviewers who are close to the final consumers (learners, prospects, partners) of the translated audio.

### Practices

1. Be sure to start with a complete English (or source language) list or glossary of key product or messaging terms. Get this glossary translated prior to starting on the main content and be sure to have the translations reviewed and approved by a suitable expert.
2. Review scripts in the original language and obtain the customer's guarantee that they are definitive. All stakeholders should consider these final before embarking on the process that leads to recording.
3. Select voice talent in target languages. Have the customer approve the actor: gender, tone of voice, diction, dialect and consistency with voice talent in original language.
4. Have the approved script translated, then reviewed and approved by the customer.
5. Record the approved voice talent, reading from the approved, translated script. Be sure to review the resulting recordings as soon as possible after recording as it is often difficult to re-engage voice talent after long periods.

### Problem Avoided

Translation vendors need to work from written scripts, so if the original-language copy is not available, or if the original audio was unscripted, then the vendor must charge for transcription in addition to translation.

Each step in this path – original-language script, target-language voice talent, translated script, translated audio – requires customer review and approval. Any changes made after recording require bringing linguists back into the studio, which is expensive. Build schedules around the milestones associated with each task and translate the scripts for audio early in the project to maximize efficiency.

Timely approval is also important, especially with young voice talent. If it takes three months to submit changes, a young linguist's voice may already have changed and it will be necessary to engage different voice talent to re-record the project in its entirety.

## Quality Assurance

Like the original-language project, the translated project must undergo initial QA with the vendor. Performing QA on the translated project is similar to that of the original-language project, but the most important difference is the side-by-side, on-screen comparison between original and target versions by a trained linguist.

Also, technical QA differs from linguistic QA.

- **Technical QA** gauges the integrity of the translated project at the file-level. This ensures that the hundreds or thousands of files manipulated during translation are fully functional in a manner equivalent to those in the original language, and that core functional aspects are intact. It demonstrates that the translated files are properly integrated into the eLearning package or directory structure without error and that all links and navigation work as in the original.
- **Linguistic QA** consists of viewing the original and translated versions at the same time. Linguists navigate among pages and lessons looking for truncated or out-of-place text to ensure that all the strings translated in these files appear natural and context-appropriate.

After the vendor has performed QA and made any necessary modifications, the customer can perform their own QA in house.

## Provide DTDs

In XML projects, elements may be symmetrical and well formed, but tags may be out of place. DTD (Document Text Definition) files ensure that all tags are present and in their proper hierarchy. For example, the sequence below may pass XML validation without a DTD:

```
<root>
<parent attribute="title">
  <child>Lorem ipso</child>
</parent>
  <child>Lorem ipso bis</child>
</root>
```

but the second child element would not pass the DTD because it is outside the parent tags.

When changed to:

```
<root>
<parent attribute="title">
  <child>Lorem ipso</child>
  <child>Lorem ipso bis</child>
</parent>
</root>
```

the sequence would pass.

### Goals

Ensure that files will work as in the original En.

### Practices

Although DTDs should not contain translatable content, they are a valuable part of the project for validating XML. Provide DTDs in their native directory structure to the translation vendor as part of the project handoff.

Verify that:

- original file structure is still intact
- nothing has changed aside from the content marked for translation
- there is no untranslated content
- links work properly
- non-translatables such as variables remain untranslated
- tags have not been deleted, added or changed
- special or reserved characters are not mis-mapped

#### **Problem Avoided**

The vendor should be able to perform automated checks on the files themselves to ensure that the translation process has not affected their structural integrity. DTD is an important element in this validation, and in ensuring that the translated project will load smoothly into the original eLearning environment.

The vendor should also ascertain that the translated versions functions like the original and all content intended for translation appears in the target language.

### **Have vendor perform review**

The translation vendor should return files that work for the customer without further manipulation. The vendor is in a better position to perform QA and linguistic QA immediately after translation and before delivery to the customer to verify that files are as error-free as possible before delivery.

#### **Goals**

Ensure that the translated project works the way the original does. Have translators review the translation in context, check functionality from the standpoint of the most common end-user experience, then make any necessary corrections before the project goes back to the customer.

#### **Practices**

Providing access (web login, license, etc.) to the eLearning or web content authoring system affords the vendor additional tools for troubleshooting if necessary. It is much more important that the vendor have the opportunity to perform QA on final files once they're loaded into the delivery system or website.

#### **Problem Avoided**

Some customers try to perform the initial QA themselves, but few have the dedicated, multilingual talent for it. With its trained resources, professional translation vendors can cut about 15% off the customer's time and cost to perform initial QA.

Without proper review, errors and inconsistencies in the translated product move downstream, where they become embarrassingly visible to customers, users and prospects.

## **Project Management**

Besides the technical details involved in all translation projects, there are business and logistical issues that the translation vendor can handle. Project managers are responsible for managing the budgets, schedules, preparation, translation and QA processes that go into multilingual eLearning and web projects so that customers do not need to take care of them.

The vendor should have an easy way to submit projects, review price quotations, hand off files and check project status.

For executing the project, experienced vendors provide reliable, accessible channels of communication; clear deadlines and commitments to observe them; well-defined, guaranteed service levels; and access to technical resources who are capable of solving problems jointly.

## Accommodate mid-project updates flexibly

To meet deadlines, many customers embark on translation projects before the original-language project is finished. In the course of completing original-language content, customers realize they want to make changes to content that is already in the process of being translated.

### Goals

Ensure that regardless of whether it was in the original handoff or subsequent updates the vendor translates and delivers the most recent version of the content. The vendor should be flexible enough to take maximum advantage of previous work without charging for translating files unaffected by the updates.

### Practices

Before the project begins, apprise the vendor that the content is not yet final and arrange for eventual mid-project updates. If updates are expected, try to consolidate these into as few segments as possible and limit the quantity of components and lessons affected by the updates. Translation tools and file-compare utilities can identify and isolate changed text from one handoff to the next. For example, don't hand off the update for translation if you think the product name is going to change throughout, but do hand it off if only the last lesson isn't yet finished.

### Problem Avoided

If the vendor is not flexible enough or does not have the experience to handle mid-project changes, scope changes, rewrites or hiatus, the overall project may suffer. For vendors not accustomed to working in this manner, updates have a ripple effect; however, the cost for handling the update should be proportionate to the size of update.

Documentation writers tend to give reliable estimates of changed content from one version to another. If they estimate, for example, that only 10% of the content has changed, charges for translating the update should be commensurate.

## Conclusion

The essence of a successful translation project is preparation, but not all clients are in a position to "retool" their original-language projects for translation. For one-off or incidental projects, the efficiencies and process improvements may not be worth it. The vendor should be able to itemize all anticipated costs to translate the entire project as is, then provide multiple scenarios – complete/partial/no retooling – for the customer to gauge ROI and make a decision.

Customers should also be able to rely on their vendor for technical expertise in making source files more localization-ready. This will help to control costs and shorten time to market on future projects. Customers should also look to the vendor for flexibility, risk management, the ability to offer various scenarios when budget or time is tight, and constructive, forward-looking answers to their most urgent translation questions.

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