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Studies on translation and multilingualism



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Web translation as a genre



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Brussels, 15 December 2009

Web translation as a genre

BG	Добре дошли в Европейската комисия!
CS	Vítejte v Evropské komisi!
DA	Velkommen til Europa-Kommissionen !
DE	Willkommen bei der Europäischen Kommission !
ET	Tere tulemast Euroopa Komisjoni!
EL	Καλώς ήρθατε στην Ευρωπαϊκή Επιτροπή
EN	Welcome to the European Commission !
ES	¡ Bienvenido a la Comisión Europea !
FR	Bienvenue à la Commission européenne !
IT	Benvenuti alla Commissione europea !
LV	Laipni lūdzam Eiropas Komisijā!
LT	Sveiki atvykę į Europos Komisiją !
GA	Fáilte go dtí an Coimisiún Eorpach
HU	Üdvözljük az Európai Bizottságnál!
MT	Merħba fil-Kummissjoni Ewropea
NL	Welkom bij de Europese Commissie !
PL	Witamy na stronach Komisji Europejskiej!
PT	Bem-vindos à Comissão Europeia !
RO	Bun venit la Comisia Europeană!
SK	Vitajte v Európskej komisii !
SL	Dobrodošli na Evropski komisiji!
FI	Tervetuloa Euroopan komissioon !
SV	Välkommen till Europeiska kommissionen!

Web translation as a genre

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Foreword

The freedom of movement of people, goods, services and capital has been at the heart of European unity since the 1990s. At the same time, and beyond the treaties, the free movement of information has become a reality thanks to the Internet. Early on, the European Commission decided to seize the opportunity offered by the Web to keep people informed of its activities and points of view. In a democratic world, only one thing can hinder this freedom of knowledge sharing and learning: the multitude of languages and our poor knowledge of neighbouring languages. Fortunately, translators are there to help.

Many of the Commission web pages on the EUROPA portal have been translated into the EU official languages from the very start. Initially this happened on a case-by-case basis. The creation of a dedicated Web Translation Unit in the Directorate-General for Translation of the European Commission coincided with the rapid development of the Commission's communication policy, particularly with regard to the Internet: presence on the web cannot be unilateral, and readers are also viewed as active participants.

Translating for the web is fundamentally different from the translation of legislative texts, which introduce rights and obligations for citizens and stakeholders, demanding extreme precision and absolute concordance between the different language versions. By contrast, web communication and interaction pose a different set of challenges in terms of readability, brevity, and intercultural comprehension.

This study analyses the characteristics of web translation within the specific context of the multilingual EUROPA website at the Directorate-General for Translation, comparing it with more traditional modes of translation and pinpointing strategies used by translators to localise their texts. The study involved comparing web translator interviews with literature on translating and cross-cultural communication.

One of the key findings was that translators must be continuously aware of the cultural differences between national reader groups and that they adapt Commission messages to ensure that they are clear and comprehensible for their respective target readership. This study sheds some light on this skill, or the "inner world" of translators and their ways of matching the needs of the Commission to the cultural context of their reader.

This study is part of a series of DG Translation studies on translation and multilingualism. I wish to thank Ms Silva Kauko, the author of the study and other colleagues in my service, the Directorate-General for Translation, in particular those translators and editors who shared their experience and thoughts and helped by analysing their everyday work.

Karl-Johan Lönnroth
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European Commission

1. Introduction

There are currently around 300m Internet users in the EU, and some 1.5bn worldwide¹. When the European Commission and other EU institutions created the EUROPA portal in 1995, hardly anyone could have predicted how significant the web would become – or how big EUROPA would one day become.

Since then, the portal has developed and in recent years, the thinking behind it has begun to change too. Gradually, the European institutions are refocusing their websites, moving towards more concise, user-centred websites that enable citizens and stakeholders to find the information or services they are looking for as quickly as possible. The Commission has also started to explore the potential for two-way communication offered by web 2.0 (blogs, social networking, forums etc.). This potential was demonstrated by Steve Hildebrand, deputy national campaign director of Barack Obama's 2008 Presidential Campaign, at his presentation to European Commission staff, *"How to use social media to communicate effectively with the citizen"*². These developments are accompanied by a shift in what is considered appropriate language on EUROPA websites, with the Commission attempting to move towards a clearer, shorter and less jargony style.

Where possible, Commission webpages are published in a number of languages, to make the information accessible to as many readers as possible. This approach – and the EU's entire multilingualism policy – is based on the notion that, in a transparent and democratic EU, **citizens must be well informed and have the opportunity of taking part in public debates**.

In the first half of 2009, EUROPA had around 20m visits and 12m unique visitors a month. According to the latest statistics, 52% of visits were to English-language pages. For the top level pages of EUROPA, which are available in all languages, English is less predominant; it is still on top but only with 23%. German, Spanish and French each represent between 10 and 15% of visits on top level pages. It is currently not possible to give a more detailed language breakdown for individual pages; and, where pages exist only in one or two languages, we have no way of knowing whether visitors would have viewed them in another language, had it been possible.

An evaluation of EUROPA³ realised for the responsible service, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Communication (DG COMM), concluded that users were **fairly satisfied with the language coverage**. As many as 89% of survey respondents reported that they "frequently" or "always" found the information in a language they were comfortable with. The level of satisfaction in each case was closely linked to the language availability for the information, which shows that translating for Commission's web pages is a useful service for EUROPA readers.

In 2006, in response to growing pressure for Commission pages to be published in a wider variety of languages, the European Commission's Directorate-General for Translation DGT

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/policy/internet_gov/index_en.htm

² 10 June 2009.

³ Ernst & Young – February 2008 – Executive Summary: Evaluation of the EUROPA website

created a special Unit for translating web pages. Currently around 100 translators provide web texts in all 23 official languages. However, DGT cannot satisfy all requests for web translations coming from other Commission departments, so the majority of texts on EUROPA are outsourced by Commission Directorates-General to external translators beyond the control of DGT, and also DGT outsources a part of the web translations under its responsibility.

This study was realised through interviews with ten Commission web translators and editors who were designated as a reference group by the Head of the Web Translation Unit, and a comparative analysis of translations of web texts in different languages. The findings were then viewed alongside existing literature on translation and on writing for the web, survey data on EU nationals' attitudes, as well as the Commission's communication policy. Many of the examples used in this study were highlighted by Commission web translators as examples of how they had localised their translation or solved situations where the original text would not have worked in the target culture unless it was adapted.

2. Theory

Writing for the web is the subject of great amounts of literature, in print and on the web. There have also been many studies on multilingual websites, and the architecture and technology of multilingual websites is a rapidly developing field. Though much less has been written on the actual translation of web texts, most of what has been said on writing for the web is valid for translation, too. This study therefore examines web translations against the ideals of web writing.

Why is linguistic diversity and quality so important on the Commission's websites?

The principle of democratic accountability means that the EU has a duty to provide the public with information on what it is doing. While Europeans' favourite source of information on European affairs is television⁴, someone actively looking for specific information often turns to the web.

The importance of a wide spread of languages and concise, clear, accessible writing is most apparent when the EU finds itself in the public spotlight, and when the stakes are high – for instance in the run-up to national referendums on treaty reform. Not only must the relevant information be available on EUROPA in the relevant languages, but prospective visitors must be able to find it via search engines, and must be able to digest it easily. In other words, the content and structure of EUROPA must address the public's concerns and its language must mirror the language of the general public. Otherwise, people will look for information on other sites, which may be inaccurate or even hostile to the EU.

In view of this, a functional approach ("skopos") to translation would seem appropriate for examining web translations: **how do language versions influence their readers?** But studying such influences would require extensive in-depth research including interviews with readers and observation of their reactions. That is why web translations are examined here from a more "linguistic" point of view: this involved comparing and contrasting the contents and purpose of different language versions and studying the relationship between translation solutions and what we know about cultural habits or attitudes of the various language groups.

In spite of this choice, made on practical grounds, it is important to consider EUROPA and its languages as an active agent in Commission communication work. As Yves Gambier points out⁵, translating for the web can be studied as an action which impacts on society, not just as an intellectual process.

⁴ Special Eurobarometer *The Europeans in 2009* http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_308_en.pdf

⁵ Yves Gambier : *Trajectoires*, in *Traduire pour le web*, Actes des universités d'été et d'automne 2005 et du colloque international Traduction spécialisée: chemins parcourus et autoroutes à venir. Traduire pour le Web. Rennes, Université Rennes II, 10 et 11 juin 2005. Direction Daniel Gouadec. P. 51

The declared objectives of the EUROPA website are to:

- respond to the needs of people with a broad and/or professional interest in EU affairs;
- help people looking for a particular service, or for information on their rights or EU policies;
- communicate the views of the EU institutions, including the Commission, to the widest possible audience;
- allow people to express and exchange their views and opinions throughout Europe;
- help create a sense of European community as a supplement to the national sphere.

Communicating about Europe via the Internet – Engaging the citizens. SEC (2007)1742

A translation genre

While the word *genre* more frequently refers to a category of texts than to a set of translations or to the translation process itself, it can legitimately be applied in relation to web translation activity, as it can refer both to:

- the translation of texts of a particular genre (texts written for the Internet environment), and
- a type of translation with special features connected to the form in which they are published and read.

Daniel Gouadec⁶ suggests categorising translations according to "**type**" (e.g. *synoptic*, *selective* or *integral*) and "**mode**" (*standard*, *decrypted*, *banalised* or *absolutely conform*).

In the case of Commission web translation, the *type* of translation used is basically the *integral* one (in most cases, the whole contents of the original text are translated), but the *mode* may vary. While in legal translation the *absolutely conform* mode prevails, the web translators of the Directorate-General for Translation of the European Commission (DGT) typically choose the mode according to the expected readership, editing details of the text as they translate – “trediting” (from translating + editing).

Gouadec also classifies translations according to their degree of "**finition**", which may vary according to the use of the translation: *raw* translation; ready for *delivery to customer*; ready for *publication*. DGT web translations invariably fall within the last category of *ready for publication*.

⁶ *Traduire pour le Web*, p. 26-27

Therefore, if we compare different DGT translation activities, for web translation the **flexibility lies in the area of mode**: if necessary or desirable, the text can be made more accessible to the reader by using *decryption* or *banalisation* techniques. In contrast, administrative documents offer the translator less flexibility in *mode*, but more in the level of *finition*, as many of the texts are for internal information only. For these texts, DGT also offers its customers oral or written summaries, which are examples of *synoptic* or *selective* types of translation.

Ideally, the texts dealt with by DGT Web Translation Unit are web texts, meaning that they have been written for the web and have the generally accepted characteristics of a web text, as presented in the next chapter. This is often the case, but not always. Also, the Web Unit uses special technical tools and formats which are not used for other Commission translations. These two factors make them a separate category among the texts DGT deals with.

Though the translator of web texts is clearly in a very different position from that of a literary translator, both routinely grapple with the question: how visible should the original culture be in the translation?

The art of the literary translator lies partly in striking the right balance between an “invisible” translation that is stylistically faultless, fluent and enjoyable (what **Lawrence Venuti** terms “domestication”) and staying faithfully close to the original (“foreignisation”). In this matter, the translator is the authority; a role highlighted by his or her name appearing alongside the author's, and the fact that a small number of literary translators gain fame in their own right.

Venuti criticises too much domestication. "By producing the illusion of transparency, a fluent translation masquerades as a true semantic equivalence when it in fact inscribes the foreign text with a partial interpretation, partial to English-language values, reducing if not simply excluding the very differences that translation is called on to convey."⁷

To what extent does this criticism apply to the translation of informative, web or marketing texts? In the case of the European Commission, there is probably no special benefit to be gained by showcasing its internal organisational culture. On the other hand, the reader is already aware of the "foreignness" of the Commission, and a distinctively national style might seem surprising. This study tries to tackle these questions by contrasting the experience gained by the Commission's web translators with the organisation's communication policy.

Particularities of web texts

Web specialists largely agree on the basic characteristics of web texts: individual paragraphs and the text overall should be short, because reading on screen is slower than reading on paper and people tend to "scan" web pages to check quickly if they contain anything useful.

A web page should be able to stand alone: even occasional users should not need to consult other pages on the website to understand the context. The choice of wording is important,

⁷ Lawrence Venuti: *The Translator's Invisibility*, p. 16. Second edition, 2008. Routledge, London

because web users rely on keywords for finding the information they are looking for through search engines. Linking the most suitable words to other pages is also an art of its own.

One of the experts in this area is **Gerry McGovern**⁸. He rates websites according to how well they enable users to *complete the “tasks”* that bring them to the site, whether the task is to find information, buy something or fill in an administrative form. "The latest research into web habits shows people are becoming much less patient online – they want to reach a site fast, get the job done and then leave", writes the Internal Comms Hub⁹. Apparently, the average website visitor stays on a site for less than two minutes¹⁰. In those precious seconds, the text should provide the information needed, with possibly something extra that the publisher wants to communicate – in a credible manner.

The easiest and cheapest way to satisfy customers' (or website visitors') needs is to let them do it online, thus avoiding a lot of human work (information services, sales, etc). But, as McGovern says, *self-service is only cheaper if it works* – in other words, organisations must find out what their website-users really need and build their website around that. This advice applies mainly to the contents and structure; it has relatively few implications for translators, though finding good, unambiguous translations of labels and navigation menus are a crucial part of the web-translator's work.

According to **Marsa Luukkonen**¹¹, web texts are used in a similar way to printed quick-reference books or manuals. Like reference books, websites should make fact-finding easy – employing additional tools such as menus and links. In contrast, brochure or marketing-style texts should be avoided on websites, because they do not satisfy the specific needs of the user.

In short: texts should be short, gain the interest and confidence of the reader within seconds, and include words that make the page rank high on a search results list.

Most of what has been said about *writing for the web* is valid for web translation, too.

Other characteristics of a good web text relate to time. First, web publishers must ensure that their pages are up to date and of current relevance – in line with user expectations. This is only possible if web texts are concise and lend themselves to frequent updates. This is particularly important in the case of multilingual websites, but a difficult objective to achieve. Updating a detail may be simple in the English original, but having it translated into other languages may require much more work because of the gender of words in many languages (masculine or feminine), number (Slovenian has dual in addition to singular and plural), declination of nouns, adjectives and numerals in Finno-Ugrian languages and the *concordance des temps* in Romance languages, to name just a few of the features which the translation requester may not think of.

In addition to playing a role in catching the attention of search engines, the choice of individual words is important also for drawing the attention of the reader. Website users

⁸ <http://www.gerrymcgovern.com/>

⁹ A network of communicators working mainly in the private sector.
<http://www.internalcommshub.com/open/news/ruthless.shtml>

¹⁰ Jakob Nielsen: Google is making you dumber, in Business Week 2007.
http://www.businessweek.com/debateroom/archives/2007/05/google_is_makin.html

¹¹ <http://www.saunalahti.fi/marsan/>

typically scan titles, subtitles and highlighted parts for the information they need. Clear wording in menus is essential for a good website, says Luukkonen.

Jakob Nielsen¹², a specialist in the *usability* of websites, talks about the "3 nasties":

- bland, generic words
- made-up words or terms
- starting with blah-blah and deferring the information-carrying text to the end.

These are also the nasty features of any text that is difficult to translate. A set of such characteristics can be used as an indicator to measure the quality of Commission web texts, be it originals or translations.

Translating for the web

The Internet was created in English, and in its early days, it was expected to contribute to the dominance of English. In fact, the share of web pages in English has decreased steadily. International companies, like international organisations, frequently publish multilingual information on their websites instead of expecting their customers to read the organisation's preferred language or to be satisfied with basic information in English.

Translating for the web has not yet drawn the attention of researchers and consultants as much as writing for the web or multilingual publishing. Available literature includes the collection *Traduire pour le web*, which consists of the proceedings of two 2005 seminars on specialised translation, edited by Daniel Gouadec, as well as some articles in *Text typology and translation*, edited by Anna Trosborg in 1997, and some more recent articles.

In one such article, **Sissel Marie Rike** examines web translation from the globalisation point of view, arguing that *from a translation perspective, 'globalization' covers both translations into English for a global audience (internationalization), and multilingual translations geared to local cultures (localization)*.¹³ Most translations for EUROPA fall into the second category: translating for the website is expected to help the Commission "go local", and ideally as many pages as possible are translated into the 23 official languages, or at least into several languages. On the other hand, Rike mostly studied company websites written originally in a national language and then translated into English for serving foreign customers, while the European Commission currently drafts most of its web texts in non-native English and translates them into several other languages.

Localisation is generally understood to include, in addition to a change of language, the adapting of a text to different versions of the marketed product, to different legislation, etc. **David Katan**¹⁴ explains the need for translators to act as cultural mediators, allowing communication to pass between language communities. A mediator needs competences such as knowledge about society (history, traditions, values...); communication skills; technical skills (computer literacy...) and social skills (rules of social relations, self-control). These

¹² <http://www.useit.com/alertbox/nanocontent.html>

¹³ Sissel Marie Rike: *Translation of Corporate Websites and the Changing Role of the Translator*, in LSP & Professional Communication, Volume 8, Number 1, Spring 2008.

¹⁴ David Katan: *Translating Cultures*. St Jerome, 1999.

competences seem to match exactly the competences required of a translator for the general public, for instance in DGT's Web Unit.

It is arguably particularly important for web translators not to alienate readers with “**noise**” – negative effects arising from differences between the drafter's background, the translator's knowledge of the subject and the background and knowledge of the reader.

Though Commission web texts are not advertising texts, they do aim to be credible, engaging and, in some cases, persuasive – like good advertising. Their effectiveness will depend in part on how well they fit into the cultural “schema” of the reader. “If the advertising message does not fit the consumers' schema, they will ignore the message, and the ad is consequently wasted” writes **Marieke De Mooij**¹⁵. Similarly, Commission web texts benefit from being tailored to the cultural background of each reader group. This issue is studied in Chapter 4 dealing with localisation.

Christina Schäffner¹⁶ has examined the factors which influence the form of the translated text and argues that *it is above all the functions of the source text and the target text in their respective cultures that determine translation strategies*. Schäffner's research deals principally with international conventions and legal texts, but a chapter dealing with speeches and political statements is particularly relevant for web translation. Many speeches and statements have an audience that is wider than the source language community. In her particular examples, the source texts – speeches by German politicians to the German people on the reunification of Germany – had a persuasive function, whereas their translations into English for media use were only informative. The foreign readers of the translated English versions also lacked understanding of the implicit information included in the German source text, so in order to avoid misunderstandings, some background information was added to the English translations.

It is worth noting that, in case of Commission web translation, the culture of origin is the **organisational culture of the Commission** rather than the personal culture of the author of the text or the culture linked to the language used, e.g. British culture.

¹⁵ Marieke De Mooij: Translating Advertising. Painting the Tip of an Iceberg. The Translator, Volume 10, Number 2 (2004), p. 181

¹⁶ Christina Schäffner: *Strategies of Translating Political Texts*, in *Text Typology and Translation*, Anna Trosborg (ed.) The Aarhus School of Business, 1997.

3. Particularities of web translation in DGT

The shift from translating mainly legal documents to translating websites influences translators' workflow, terminology, as well as revision practices. This chapter studies the differences mainly from the point of view of DGT's web translators.

The Directorate-General for Translation is organised into language departments, one for each official language of the European Union. In addition, there are a number of non-language-specific units that deal with outsourcing, IT tools etc. In 2006, the Translation DG created a special translation Unit for web texts. Unlike the language-specific departments, this Unit is multilingual, producing translations in all of the official EU languages.

The Web Unit comprises a team of just over one hundred translators. Part of their work involves editing texts that Commission departments intend to publish on their websites. A large number of these texts (which are usually drafted in English, sometimes in French) are then translated into several other languages by the Web Unit.

The traditional language departments receive their tasks from a planning unit, which checks that translation requests are conform to rules about length, format and deadlines, and that priorities are respected. Heads of Unit then distribute the translation tasks among translators, and once translations are ready, the assistants forward them on to the requesters and ensure that they are archived under the correct code. However, the structure is simpler in the Web Unit: language teams of 3–8 translators distribute the work among themselves and once a translation is complete, they send the final product on to the requester.

The members of the reference group had all previously worked as translators in one of DGT's language departments and could therefore compare these two main production lines in DGT. The main differences mentioned spontaneously were:

- **the variety of texts,**
- **a sense of closeness to the reader,**
- **freedom.**

Different technical tools, frequent contacts with the requesters and the particularities of a multilingual unit were also mentioned. All of these particularities, perhaps with the exception of tools, were viewed positively by reference group members. Indeed, the most striking feature of the interviews was the very high level of satisfaction and motivation which the reference group members expressed in their work.

"You have to think a lot more than in traditional translation."

Interviewees mentioned that the “functional approach” to translation may be even more useful in web translation than translation in general, and they are aware of this in their own daily work: the function of each element in the text should be understood and taken into account in the translation. The place of the element on the web page and the place of the page in the website are factors to be considered when choosing the suitable translation, in order to help the user to navigate on EUROPA.

In addition, the web translator has to place important words in the title, at the beginning of the text and in the invisible metadata in order to improve the page's chances of appearing near the top of the Google results list. Web translators consider their work quite technical especially in the sense that they have to understand how the Internet works.

One of the translators interviewed said that she feels more responsible now than in the traditional translation unit, because now she can see the result of her work, while the texts she used to translate seemed to "disappear in a drawer". Seeing a news item that she had translated feature on the national news the following day gave her a sense of importance that she did not have before, the functional significance of good translation being less directly apparent for legislative and administrative texts.

Translating for the web requires the use of a particular IT tool for editing metadata, Trados TagEditor being the one currently in use by DGT Web translators. Its influence on the translators' work as well as other technical considerations will also be presented in this chapter.

Variety

"My work is a puzzle, with often ten subjects to be treated in one day. This guarantees that I will never be bored, but on the other hand I cannot specialise either."

The texts treated in the Web Translation Unit are on average shorter than in traditional language departments, and so are the deadlines. There are also many more text types than in the traditional translation units: news items, citizens' summaries of legislative projects, entire websites; texts for specialists, for the young; search forms, guidelines, etc. Translators encounter a greater variety of styles than their counterparts in language departments. On average, the texts are closer to the informal end of the style spectrum than other DGT source texts.

Translators work for varied requesters and not for a few Directorates-General only, as is often the case in specialised translation units. Within a day, the translator may touch on several fields, and so must do a lot of basic research and learn something new on a daily basis. Given the small size of language teams, there is little room for thematic specialisation.

Talking about their work, interviewees tended to mention the daily news article for the Commission homepage and large website projects. However, a significant part of the work actually consists of forms, tables and other material which is technically slow and cumbersome to translate. This is handled by the Web Unit because it is intended for the web environment, not because such documents require a special web style. In addition, they translate "Citizens' summaries" which give brief and easy-to-read overviews of major Commission proposals.

DGT web translators also carry out spot-checks on Commission websites, either online or on staging servers; these include sites translated by DGT and others that come from an external translation source. As webmasters are not able to consult speakers of all languages

when they upload texts, a multitude of simple errors go uncorrected – titles with missing words, ungrammatical expressions when a number is removed or a person's name is changed, etc. This kind of error casts a shadow on the credibility of the whole portal, making spot-checks highly valuable. In some cases, translators are given a login to the content management system of the requesting DG and can translate online.

Terminology

"During a particularly heated period of the economic crisis I noticed that the German terminology used by the media developed within a week. I made it my daily goal to always use up-to-date terminology in the homepage news."

Translators in the Web Unit don't usually create terminology for a new subject from scratch, because terminology work is inevitably well advanced in the language department before the Commission wishes to write about the new policy or activity on EUROPA. Still, the translator has to get acquainted with the topic and find out what language has been used to talk about it in the media of the relevant language community, and to what extent the Commission's terminology can work in the informal web environment.

While in legal translation it is important to ensure the unambiguous understanding of the text by using the terms already used in earlier related texts, in typical web texts it is vital to use words which non-specialists use. The task of translating summaries of EU legislative proposals ("Citizens' summaries") has been transferred to the Web Unit because of its experience in translating texts for the general public. If the summaries are to serve their purpose of informing the public, they must be easy for non-specialists to read and understand.

The web translators seem to agree that the greatest difference between their output and that of other DGT translation departments is that they **choose their wording first and foremost with the reader in mind**, choosing well-known words and expressions understood even by the occasional visitor and with a strong likelihood of being typed in search engines, as well as adopting the appropriate register for the intended readership (taking into account cultural habits, young/adult, specialist/layman). If only because of the search-engine issue, terminology choices in web translation differ from those in translations of printed material.

Web translators may consult IATE¹⁷ like their colleagues in DGT language departments, but in many cases do not consider this necessary. Instead, they look outside for the solutions most likely to meet success among web users. When translators judge that official terminology must be used on a web page even if it is not widely used by national media, they take care to include the layman's terms in the metadata for the webpage, so that users are more likely to find the page via search engines. The reference group members consider this as one of their main challenges and also sources of pride.

There is no clear rule, however. Many translators in the reference group insist that terminology choices have to be flexible. The English editors look for the words that work for people using the web. For terminology work, they may use a regular Google search or the keyword tool on Google AdWords (to identify the most popular search terms in a given field and to see what words people are combining in searches, e.g. are people combining "flu" with "swine" or with "novel" more?).

¹⁷ InterActiveTerminology for Europe; database for EU-related terminology in 23 languages.

When search engines do not provide adequate solutions, translators consult relevant websites in their target language, and fellow native-speakers, as useful guides to search-friendly terminology. For instance, the Swedish team looks for Swedish and Finnish administrations' language models. They tend to find the terminology on the Swedish Parliament's *EU-upplysningen* information site¹⁸ quite close to what people in Sweden use, and use this website as a source of inspiration.

An example of unorthodox terminology is the English team's tendency to avoid *enlargement* in texts for the general public, preferring a variety of different formulations – even *EU expansion* on one occasion – because according to them *enlargement* sounds unnecessarily like specialist terminology in certain contexts. Generally, they resist established terminology that they find jargon-like and inappropriate because not readily understood by most readers.

The English team also avoids writing *Member States* and uses *EU countries* (or in some contexts *national governments/authorities*) instead. For Spanish, *paises de la UE* is natural, but there is no problem in using *paises miembros de la UE*, also because the style requirements in Romance languages favour using variation.

"I use at least two synonyms in each text, to make sure that search engines will find my translation."


The Finnish team never uses the expression *kolmannet maat*, "third countries". Instead of *yhteisö*, "the Community", they always write *EU*; however, with search engines in mind, they try to use at least two synonyms in each text (title, body text and metadata included). They may use the legal terminology if the page is intended for experts, but use everyday language for general public pages.

It seems that avoiding jargon is particularly important for the English translators and editors. This theme is further treated in Chapter 4 on Localisation. In contrast, the terminology used by the Bulgarian web translation team is not radically different from the one used in DGT's Bulgarian language department. Likewise, there is not a great difference between the Commission's Slovenian terminology and the one used in national news. The Slovenian translators follow Slovenian news and occasionally check the websites of national administrations to see what their solutions are in particular cases. They also regularly contact the Slovenian language department and the DGT Field office in Ljubljana, in order to co-ordinate solutions for slogans appearing on websites and the Slovenian press releases, for example.

In short, the choice of wording can be described as market-driven instead of being organisation-led. Although web translators claim to have more freedom in their choice of words, this is only part of the truth: even if IATE is not an authority for the web translators, and if the legal notice on EUROPA website (*the Commission accepts no responsibility or liability whatsoever ...*) makes translators independent of lawyers' opinion, readers and their search terms have to be respected, and consequently the translator cannot choose terminology on an instinctive basis only.

¹⁸ <http://www.eu-upplysningen.se/>

There is no terminology database for web translations, but most translations are done with translation memories, which means that earlier translation solutions are easily accessible. The **technical terminology** of the web page is a distinctive feature. The expressions used for navigation and other web-particular functions are chosen carefully. Many language teams have created their own web terminology.

Category	Energy and natural resources
Sub-category	Gas – electricity
IPG classification (to be found here)	6, 11, 13, 15
Description (max. 150 char. – summary of article in 1 sentence)	High-e Energy-intensive filament bulbs will soon disappear from store shelves in the EU shops
Keywords (max. 48 char. per keyword) Always include: EU, commission	EU, European commission, energy, efficient, inefficient, light bulbs, ban, lamps, incandescent, halogen, compact fluorescent lamps, CFLs, light-emitting diodes, LEDs, frosted, carbon dioxide, electricity, CO2, carbon dioxide, climate change, greenhouse gas, consumers, filament, environment
Photo (min. 240x160 pxl, landscape format) (check copyright) (insert picture using Insert > object > create from file > insert as icon and indicate reference if it needs to be bought)	http://ec.europa.eu/avservices/download/photo_download_en.cfm?id=22251&type=4 
Headline (max. 60 char. With spaces)	Lights out for traditional bulbs
Content (max. 350 words or 2150 char. (abstract included) with spaces)	Under a regulation that new rules comes ing into force in September, manufacturers and importers can no longer sell clear incandescent light bulbs of 100 watts or above in the EU. However, shops can may continue to sell bulbs already in stock.

Avoiding jargon is important for the English web-editing team.

Style

"You don't have to be a master of prose, but sensitive to that aspect, writing more like a journalist. A web text has to be easily understandable, while a technical Regulation can be more difficult as it is only intended for specialists."

It has been argued that translating a web page requires more stylistic skills than translating a report or a legislative text. A web page should be readily understandable without the support provided by context, while a page of printed material is usually seen as a part of a larger document or set of documents. A website must compete with other websites that search engines may offer web users, and so has to gain the readers' confidence immediately. Researchers and the reference group members agree: a web text has to say as much as possible in few words.

Commission translators are always expected to adapt their discourse to the house style, as professional translators do. The style consists of elements such as terminology, ways of addressing the reader, length of sentences and paragraphs, and level of complexity or simplicity. In an administrative document, features of the appropriate style are, for instance, clarity, exhaustiveness and impersonality. In web translation, the features are clearly different.

Politeness, addressing readers in the second person, and political correctness are not particularities of the web; but EUROPA web pages are, in addition to replies to letters, the only Commission texts which address the citizen personally (official letters to Member States' representatives, standard letters to contractors etc. being entirely different text genres). Web translators have therefore pioneered new registers for talking directly to readers in each language.

Some of the reference group members consider that they are subject to higher stylistic requirements than other translators, because their work always goes for publication, and is usually intended for the "general public" instead of experts only. Not all our interviewees agree on this, however. Some consider that all translation requires stylistic skills: more of them for a Commission Communication and less for a technical report. It is rather a question of *different* styles than of *more* style. One of the interviewees added that the style of ephemeral web pages is less important than that of books.

In web translation, as an example journalistic style is needed for translating news items. Translating the title *You're never too young to look after your health* by a short *Juventud rima con salud* is a good example: it is catchy but neutral. However, news stories form just a relatively small part of web translators' work. When translating administrative advice or forms, it is essential to be clear – **creativity and entertaining expressions would not be welcome**. Polls and consultations are another frequent type of text where finding the right style requires successfully imagining yourself in the position of the reader.

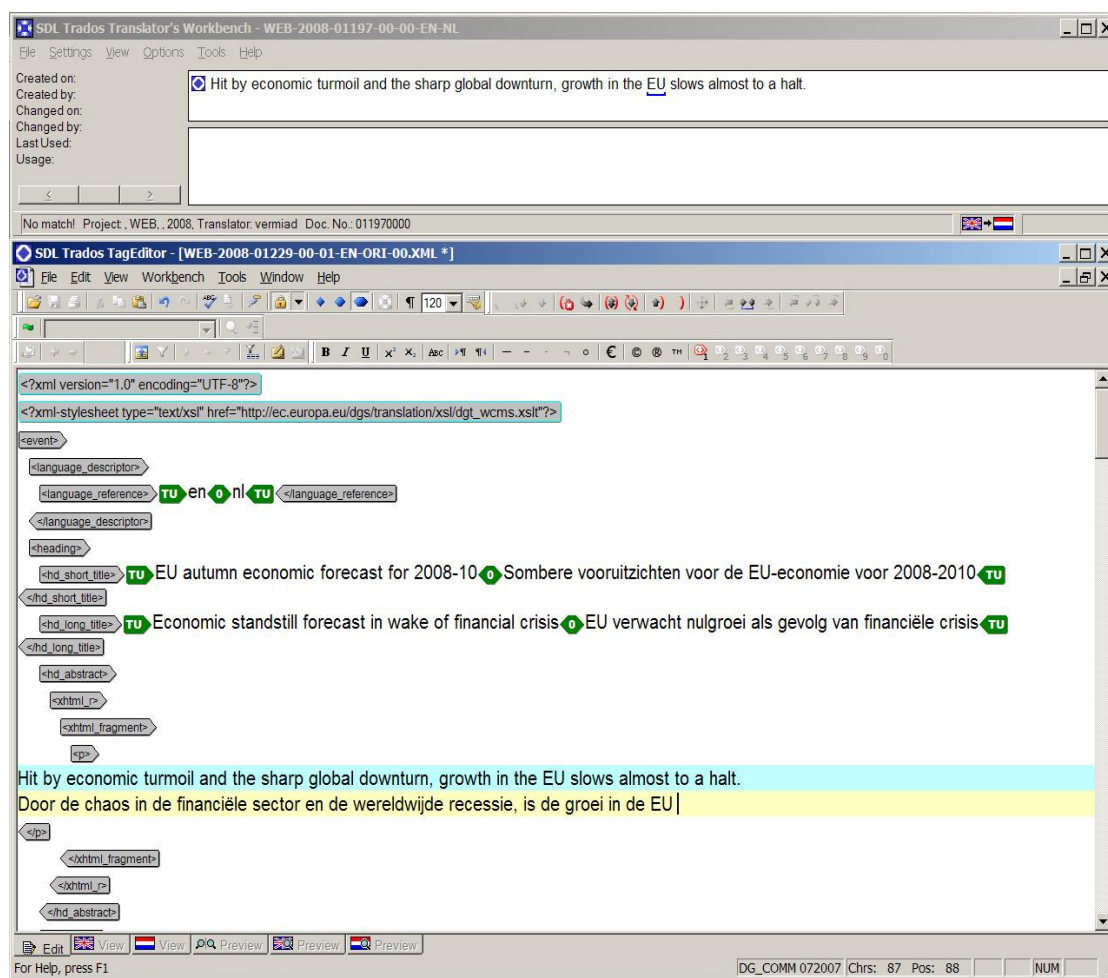
One of the translators summarised the question by saying that if you translate literature, you need to catch the personal style of the writer and reproduce it in your language, but when translating for the Commission website, the aim is to be clear, not to have an interesting style

drawing the attention of the reader to yourself. On the web pages studied for this paper, not a single case of strikingly personal or creative style was found.

Technical tools

Web translators use specialised tools, which typically allow the creation of links. Learning to use them takes time and requires web translators to be computer-literate and willing to learn more.

A widely used tool in DGT web translations is SDL Trados **TagEditor**, for use with Word, Excel, PowerPoint, HTML, XML and other types of files. TagEditor also enables editing of metadata on the attributes and functions of text elements, and can be used in combination with SDL Trados Translator's Workbench, a translation memory tool. The translator works on the text in a bilingual window, in between tags, and may also modify the codes in the file in order to change the segmentation (typically divide the message of one sentence in two, or combine two sentences of the original version), apply bold formatting to certain words etc, if this improves the readability of the text in the target language.



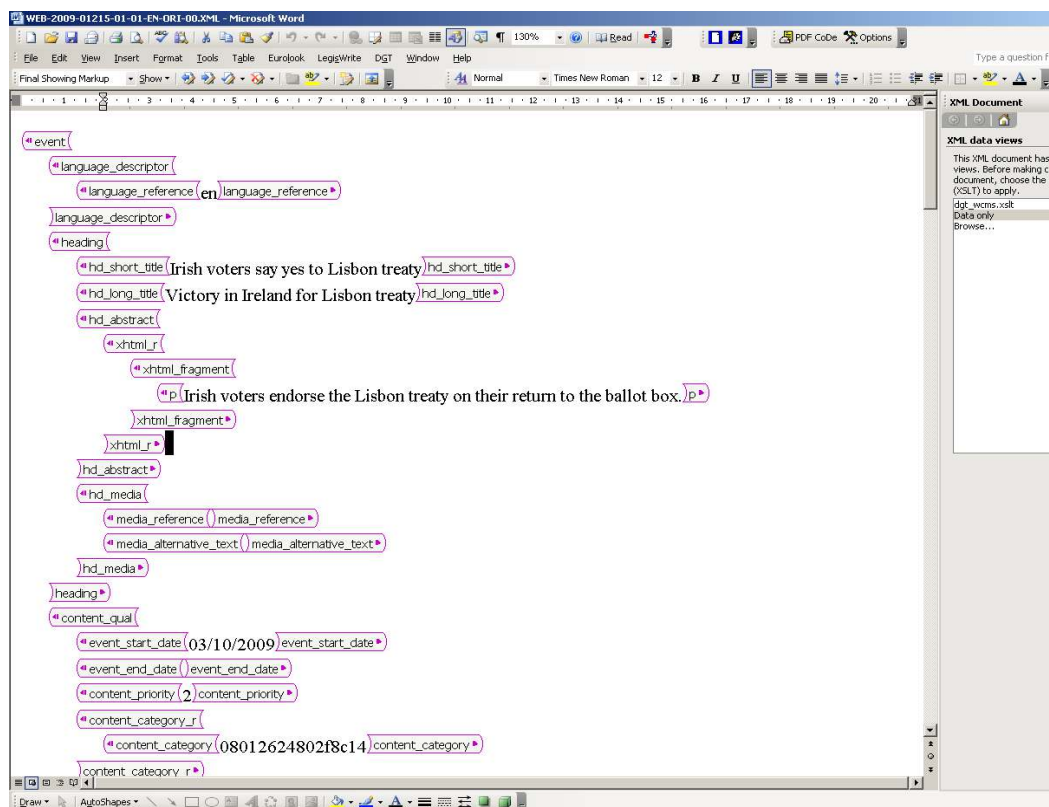
XML document treated with TagEditor and using a translation memory.

TagEditor is perceived as slow and cumbersome by Web Unit staff. The sentence-by-sentence approach common to most translation memory systems restricts translators' ability to tredit (translate while editing) texts giving prominence to the issues of greatest interest to their readership. Changing the order of two sentences or adding an extra caption is quite complicated.

Some of the translators interviewed insisted that this is not a marginal technical inconvenience but a serious problem for their efficiency. For instance, one of them said that in the early days of the Web Translation Unit, they used to edit the homepage news items more thoroughly than now, partly because they used to work with traditional Word documents, without TagEditor.

Web texts are sent for translation in **different formats**, depending on the customer's preference. Although documents in all formats are translated using either Word or TagEditor, each format brings its own benefits and inconveniences for the translator.

XML is the format recommended for EUROPA web content management. It offers web authors many possibilities: they can use and re-use content in a flexible way, as content is separate from formatting. Further, it enables webmasters to upload all versions quickly and without any risk of corrupting the text or mixing up language versions. The negative side from the translator's point of view is that – in spite of a *preview* function – you cannot always see what the final product will exactly look like when published. In addition, working with XML is slow: the translator shifts between the *editing* mode for translating and the *preview* mode for viewing the (approximate) result, and this takes more time than working in a Word document.



XML document in editing mode

Word still remains the most commonly used format for Commission web texts. Handling Word documents is easier and faster, but on the other hand a whole website sent for translation in Word format means that translators cannot see how the different parts are linked with each other. Websites translated in Word are also more prone to mistakes in the publishing phase.

²⁰ DGT's application for creating and handling translation documents

This variety of formats means that it may take some time for the Web Unit's planning team to upload the incoming translation task in *Dossier Manager*. In addition, requesters sometimes send their requests in formats which are hardly acceptable for translation. The Unit's planning section tries to keep all customers informed of which formats are accepted, to avoid unnecessary delays.

DGT's web translators tend to prefer the most direct ways of working: **ideally they would like always to translate on-line**, typing the translation directly in a window and feeding it into the web content management system of the requester, as is done with some customer DGs. This working method enables them to see how their translations will look online, to assess the function of each paragraph, menu item or other text element, and to ensure that navigation works properly.

On the other hand, working in the requesters' web content management system has various other repercussions. First, it is not necessarily faster or easier than translating with TagEditor and Translator's Workbench. In addition, translation memories cannot be used.

What is more, work done in this way cannot be integrated into the standard, automated workflow systems. For instance, the translation cannot be accessed through *Dossier Manager*. In *Suivi*²¹, a blank document has to be created to indicate that the task has been performed. Lastly, on-line translations cannot easily be exported (saved) to *Euramis*²².

To make things even more complicated, not all Commission DGs use the same web content management system, in spite of instructions in the current Commission's internet strategy to use the corporate system. Today, the Web Translation Unit spends a significant amount of time sorting out different kinds of software and systems.

Web translators look forward to the development of translation tools more suited to web-based content.

Workflow

"When translating, you have to check things, find information etc; it is difficult to measure the amount of this work."

There are two major differences in the organisation of the Web Translation Unit as compared to the language departments: first, the Unit is multilingual and divided into multilingual sectors, and secondly, translators themselves, organised in small language teams, handle the assigning of incoming requests in *Suivi* and send their finalised translations to the requester. Both of these factors have a considerable impact on their work.

For the reference group members, the multilingual character of the Unit is definitely an improvement. **There is more cross-language cooperation around translation tasks.** An

²¹ DGT application allowing to manage, control and plan translation work based on resource capacity

²² Central translation memories for the DGT

away-day in January 2009 further helped language teams to mingle, and some of the translators with a long experience at DGT say that their organisation reminds them of the time when DGT was organised in multilingual thematic departments, when contacts between language Units were more frequent than today.

Most of the interviewed translators did not object to working with *Suivi*, instead of having the translation traffic dealt with by assistants and the individual assignment of jobs by the Head of Unit.

Web translations are intended for environments that are continuously changing, meaning that they are never considered as once-and-for-all final versions, and customer DGs think it quite normal to make alterations once a text is online. Frequently, requesters ask translators to take a look at the final website in order to check that everything is correct. If translators themselves spot a mistake on a published website, they can usually still have it corrected. No specific workflow has been created for this. In some cases translators are granted the possibility to make changes on the website themselves, working directly in the corporate web content management system (cwcms).

All in-house web translations are revised by a second Web Unit translator, because, once returned to requesters, texts are published with no further treatment. Some find that the revision practices in the Web Unit are what really distinguish it from the other translation units in DGT. When revising colleagues' work in the language department, they used to check that everything had been translated paragraph after paragraph, that numbers were correct, etc. Now, they check that the text reads nicely, the title is good, the message is conveyed, and there is no redundancy. After all, it is rather the content of the text as a whole that has to be transferred and not individual sentences.

Most outsourced translations are revised, too²³.

Measuring the Web Unit's or individual translators' **productivity** is difficult, especially using the number of pages as a criterion. Web translators' work consists of short bits and pieces, and background work has to be done for each of them. Because the share of background work is generally inversely proportional to the length of the task, and because on the other hand specialised terminology on the topic has already been created by the language department, comparing the Web Unit's production with that of the traditional language departments does not give useful results. On the other hand, **time use** might be a possible criterion to measure the volume of work and/or its difficulty.

Closeness to readers and sense of motivation

"In web translation, I think more of the reader than of the Commission."

One of the greatest changes the interviewees have experienced on moving from one of DGT's language departments to web translation is that they feel that the reader is closer to them, and

²³ Quality assurance policy for web products. DGT Directorate D, 3 December 2008.

this is a tremendous boost for their motivation and also for the amount of checks carried out before a translation is sent to the requester – in other words, for quality. The main source of ambition, motivation and job satisfaction of DGT web translators is the feeling that their work will be read by a large number of readers, and that it will serve a purpose.

This perception may be related to the fact that the translator sees the outcome of the work more quickly. Readers may also react more quickly to possible mistakes on the web, and thus feedback is quicker than if a complaint is channelled through the dedicated *Corrigenda* feedback channel²⁴ by a customer DG.

Many explained that when translating in a language department, they never knew who would read what they produced, or if anyone would ever read them. The fact that they could expect their product to be modified several times – by the customer DG, the Legal Service, the other institutions – did little to motivate them to finalise a text in an easily readable, polished form.

Some translators explained that when they are translating legislation, they concentrate in producing a complete, flawless translation. In the Web Unit, they focus on the reader instead of the Commission. However, they do not always have clear information on the purpose or target group of the text, or even on the place of the page in the DG's website. Basically, they understand that unless mentioned otherwise, the text should be targeted at the "general public".

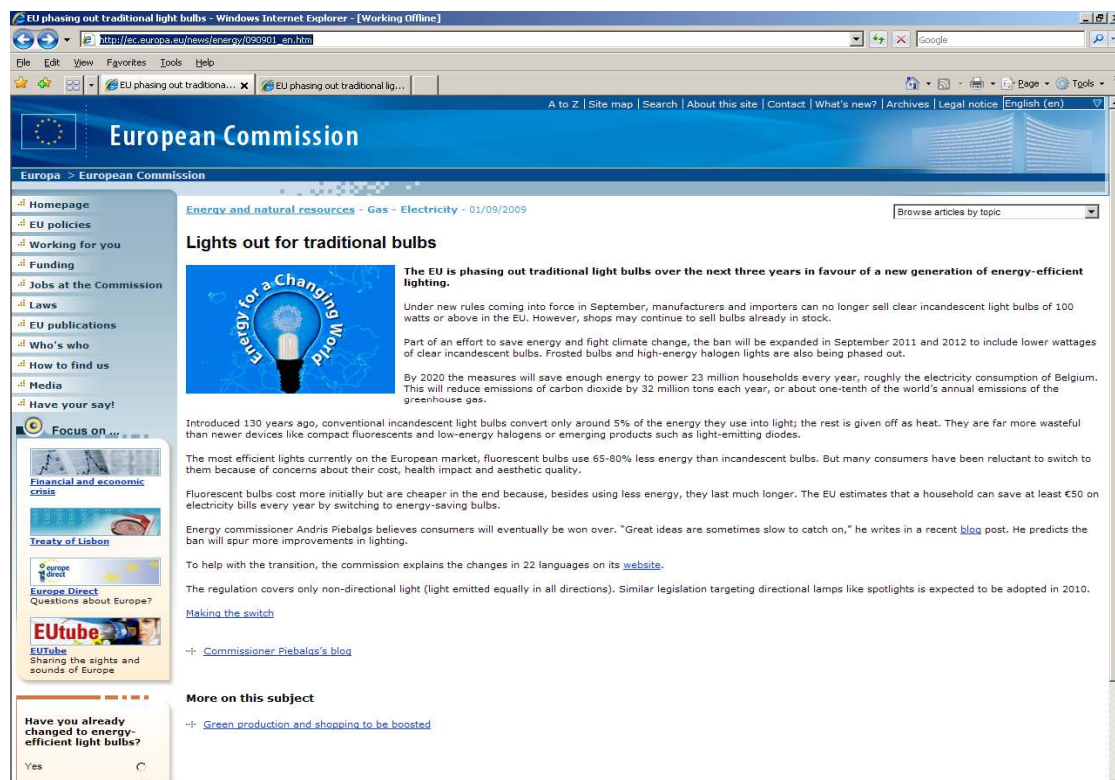
The reflection on being closer to the reader thus brings the translator closer to the receiving language community, while considering oneself translating for an invisible reader encourages the translator to follow a more "foreignising" path, to quote Venuti.

In practice, the background, needs and level of previous knowledge of website visitors vary to a great degree. **EUROPA has two audiences: those who know EU sites, and know how to find information there, and those who don't, and who look for information in a different manner.** The task of the Web Translation Unit is to help both groups to find their way.

²⁴ The *Corrigenda* system deals with requests for the correction of minor errors in documents adopted by the Commission.

Conclusions:

- Translating for the web at DGT consists of varied tasks. A DGT web translator's job corresponds to what Daniel Gouadec calls an "engineer in languages and communication" – a translator with skills in languages, translation, fact-finding, editing, localising and publishing.
- While the ultimate beneficiary of all Commission translations is the citizen (layperson or specialist), and while the customer DG's opinion is respected, the stylistic authority is not the same for all translations. For choices of wording and style, the Commission web translator is dependent on what the supposed reader would expect or like to read, in contrast to his colleague in DGT's language departments, where choices are most often based on the wording previously used by the Commission and the advice given by terminologists, the Legal Service or senior colleagues. The main downside here is that there is not enough information available on the users of various Commission web pages.
- Reference group members felt that they were serving the European citizen more directly when translating web pages than in their previous task of translating legal documents.



How to write in a way which is credible in the eyes of readers?

4. Localisation as a part of web translation

LISA²⁵, the Localisation Industry Standards Association defines localisation as "the process of modifying products or services to account for differences in distinct markets". Commercially, localisation is typically carried out by retailers of imported products or by software companies to adapting IT tools to the national context.

In communicative contexts, localisation of informative texts has a similar purpose: to create variants that have the same desired effect on readers of the various language versions. For instance, convincing a Belgian citizen to vote in European elections does not require as much persuasion as convincing a German national, because in Belgium voting is an obligation; and inhabitants of Scandinavian countries behind their triple-glazed windows would not profit from advice on reducing carbon emissions by replacing their old windows with double-glazed ones.

When localising a message, one has to take into account not only concrete factors such as national law, economy or climate, but also more psychological factors related to culture and readers' attitudes.

EU legal texts are drafted in such a way as to be compatible with any national legal system, avoiding as far as possible the need to localise language versions. Commission administrative documents are not localised either because, although in many cases adapting the contents would make understanding easier, it could also give rise to claims about unequal treatment, for instance in the case of variants in advice on applying for grants or on participating in a call for tenders.

There are areas, however, where the Commission can localise its texts, and this concerns mainly informative texts, such as web texts. As soon as the Web Unit was created in 2006, its translators were granted some freedom to adapt their language versions to better suit their readerships. Translation requesters sometimes indicate whether they like their text to be significantly adapted to national environments. This may happen in the phase of the initial translation request but more often in reply to translators' questions.

Some of the actions which the reference group members called localising could also be considered as editing: they adapt the text lightly, in order to improve its structure, to adjust the level of detail given to the reader, or to match the style with what the reader would expect. Reducing the amount of hype, at least for certain languages, and generally streamlining the text, is what web translators call treading.

Translators in the Web Unit observe the patterns of the administrative websites in the home country/countries of the language. The Spanish translators, for instance, monitor Spanish administrative websites, to see how a subject is treated by them, in addition to following the national media. When a news item comes to be translated, they first check how the theme is dealt with on Spanish websites, and adapt their terminology and approach accordingly.

²⁵ Localization Industry Standards Association LISA <http://www.lisa.org>

The Bulgarian translators check Bulgarian news sites and administrative ones, though not as regularly. They have examined navigation labels used on Bulgarian websites and follow the model given by them. They changed the Bulgarian label for the "Privacy statement" to match the (shorter) expression used on Bulgarian sites. The English web editors have many good models to follow, especially on British and US government websites.

The Finnish team monitor Finnish websites, and not only for stylistic reasons but for solutions in addressing the reader and giving advice, although they have noticed that there is relatively little interactivity on Finnish administrative websites and the reader is not often addressed directly.

The German web translators tend to follow German news sites more than administrative sites, doing on-the-spot research for expressions used on financial issues, for instance, or other areas where the vocabulary evolves quickly. Nevertheless, they continue to value established DGT terminology and previous learning.

Strictly speaking, the concept of localising is not particularly well adapted to web contents. **The web is by definition a non-local environment**, and the author, translator or publisher of a web page cannot control the geographical distribution of its readers. From this point of view, it is vital to reflect particularly on the objective of translations into the most widely used languages on EUROPA: does their target audience consist mainly of mother-tongue readers, or of a wider public? Does a considerable part of the readership of Spanish, English, French or Portuguese versions in fact live outside Europe, and should translators take this into account?

These considerations are not restricted to languages used outside Europe. Being aware that the Swedish texts are read by Swedes and Finns, the Swedish team has looked for practical solutions for issues such as how to express amounts in euro in Swedish – a good solution being "XX € (*ungefär XX kronor*)".

Localising, just like all work on EUROPA, would benefit from having more information available on the actual readers, as well as a definition of the target audience of each website or text.

Cultural habits

"The readership of websites is more varied than the readership of legal texts, which makes adopting the most appropriate style a matter of thought."

To the extent that the Internet has its own mode of expression – more direct, less formal and more concise than other written media – it can almost be considered as a culture in its own right. Web texts generally aim to follow this model, but national or language-specific differences are not completely eliminated and should be considered.

During the interviews, the reference group of web translators pondered on how and to what extent they could take into account the cultural interaction habits of their intended audience. The most frequently given examples were the degree of **formality** in addressing the reader and the need to use **synonyms** to keep the text interesting.

As there are no clear rules on matters of politeness, and classical style guides are not always suitable for the web, the translators follow national models or their instinct. For example, the German translators sometimes use the pronoun *Sie*, but favour *Du* if the target public is younger. Finns use *sinä* (tu/du) for practically everything, the French use only *vous* and the Spanish use *tú* when addressing the young, for example on the Youth portal – quite as the respective national websites. Finns occasionally use the more neutral third person; *As an EU national you can get free or reduced-cost healthcare* was translated as *EU-kansalaiset voivat saada ilmaista tai edullista sairaanhoitoa* ("EU nationals can get free...").

The Climate action website²⁶ has a set of very clear and direct titles, in English: *What you should know*, *What you can do*, *What's happening near you*, etc. The Spanish translation makes them even more reader-centred and perhaps less authoritarian: *¿Qué quiere decir?* *¿Qué puedo hacer?* *¿Qué hacen los demás?* The Swedish version is also in the first person - *Vad behöver jag veta?* – while the German version uses the polite conditional: *Was Sie wissen sollten*.

DGT web translators discuss these details a lot, as they know they influence the credibility of the website. And they are not alone. In an article about translation and advertising, **Jeremy Munday** explains the thinking behind the national adaptations of L'Oréal's slogan "Because you're worth it". Here too, the Spanish use the informal *tú* and the French the more formal *vous*. The initial version was "Because I'm worth it", but this was judged too "monetary" in France. Choosing the wrong expression, says Munday, would be "possibly counterproductive (if the reader felt insulted to be addressed too informally, or excluded if addressed formally)."²⁷

Forms to be filled in by interested readers often include a case for indicating whether the requester is a *Mr* or a *Ms*. Such titles are not regularly used in all languages. Thus 13 language versions of a form for registering as an "interest representative" with the Commission include a box for this purpose, but the translators of the remaining 9 languages considered the surname and first name to be sufficient²⁸.

The name of the *Easy reading corner* on the EUROPA homepage does not promise ease in other languages, but lets the word "corner" hint that this link does not lead to heavy legal matter: *Lesecke*, *rincón de lectura*, *coin des lectures*, *lukunurkka*... The word "easy" could be misinterpreted as a patronising term.

A different example of politeness, this time towards the subject of the text, is the news item *Concours de plumes contre l'injustice* (6 February 2009). The original French version first calls the prize-winning Portuguese journalist by her whole name and later refers to her simply

²⁶ <http://ec.europa.eu/climateaction/>

²⁷ Jeremy Munday: Advertising: Some challenges to translation Theory. *The Translator*, Volume 10, number 2 (2004), p. 209

²⁸ <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/transparency/regin/ri/registering.do?locale=en#en>

as "Maria". Several translations, including the Portuguese, repeated her whole name or, after giving the whole name once, used her last names only.

Concerning the use of synonyms in order to make the text more interesting, practices vary according to languages, as one could expect, the Romance languages using more variation than the others. An example is in a news item where the Spanish translation of "...the commission will launch a **youth** health initiative which encourages **young people** to..." reads "...la Comisión lance una Iniciativa sobre la Salud de los **Jóvenes** que anima a **este colectivo** a ..." This is a matter that the translators pay a lot of attention to, and in addition to style issues, try to find out whether repeating the same word several times makes the article rank higher on a search engine results list, or whether using several alternative expressions increases the possibilities of the website to be found.

The lead (*chapeau*) of the homepage news edited in English is often only one sentence long. The Swedes think this would look strange in Swedish, and sometimes add a second one to make it more appealing. On the other hand, French originals are more challenging for Swedish translators, because their style needs more adjusting. This perception is consistent with the categorisation of cultures as "high-context" or "low-context" cultures. In the case of the former, it is assumed that the the interlocutor will already be familiar with the context, so surplus explanation may be omitted, on the basis that the text should already be self-explanatory; whilst in the latter, information is clearly spelled out because the interlocutor is not expected to have the necessary contextual information. De Mooij observes that low-context cultures with weak uncertainty avoidance – typically the United Kingdom, but also Sweden, the Netherlands and especially Denmark – tend to favour an exacting style, while high-context cultures, such as France, Belgium and Italy, use more elaborate style also in advertising.

Likewise, English originals are often too vague to be translated without treading into Slovenian, a language which requires more specific information. Therefore, in many cases translating from English requires adding a lot of details. The following is an example of differences in the level of detail needed:

English: On the fight against climate change, president Barroso said there is growing **convergence** between Europe and the United States and both sides would cooperate more.

Slovenian: Predsednik Evropske komisije José Manuel Barroso je v zvezi z bojem proti podnebnim spremembam dejal, **da sta si stališči Evrope in Združenih držav čedalje bolj podobni**; obe strani sta se tudi zavzeli za tesnejše sodelovanje.
(homepage news of 6 April 2009)

Target group's familiarity with the subject

DGT web translators also adapt their versions on the basis of the understanding they have of their readership's previous knowledge and interest in EU affairs. The target readers' attitudes or level of acquaintance with the subject may vary from one country to another. According to the translators, this is particularly true with regard to the EU's institutional structure.

They believe that, overall, the public in the newest EU Member States are more aware of, or interested in, the existence and roles of the European institutions. By contrast, the English-language editors expect their readership to be unaware of and uninterested in the differences between the institutions. Hence the tendency of English-language web editors to use *the EU* instead of, for instance, *the Commission*. For Spanish or German EUROPA readers, according to the Web Unit reference group, *the Commission* would present no difficulty.

"In order to educate, you first have to interest," is the motto of the English editor-translators. In cases where the institutional aspect is important in a general public text, they call the Council *EU leaders* or *national leaders*, instead of simply *the EU*. There are not many cases where they would consider it necessary to add details to meet their readers' needs.

Some other language teams tend to think that in order to interest, you first have to come across as respectful of your readers' intelligence. The Finns sometimes add an explanation, for example *the Council, where representatives of States meet*. German readers, too, are expected to require more information than the English-speaking public, in order to find their reading useful. If readers know the difference between the Council and the Commission, writing "the EU" would look like underestimating them – but again, this depends on the type of text, the translators say.

The difference in the language teams' approach is so clear that it probably has a solid basis and does not represent the personal opinion of a few people only.

The Standard Eurobarometer 69 of spring 2008²⁹ supports these opinions for Finland and the UK, but not for Germany and Spain. The respondents of the opinion poll were asked whether they **had ever heard of the European Commission**. The average of positive answers in EU-27 was 78%.

"I have heard of the European Commission"

Finland	94%	Greece	86%	Slovakia	79%
Luxembourg	91%	Malta	86%	Hungary	78%
Belgium	90%	Bulgaria	85%	Germany	77%
Sweden	90%	Estonia	83%	Czech Rep.	77%
Denmark	88%	France	82%	Spain	75%
Portugal	88%	Netherlands	82%	Lithuania	75%
Ireland	87%	Austria	82%	Romania	75%
Cyprus	87%	Poland	82%	UK	71%
Slovenia	87%	Latvia	79%	Italy	68%

Certainly, the average reader of EUROPA is more informed about the EU than the national average, which the Eurobarometer aims at representing, but on the other hand not all EUROPA visitors are EU specialists, and actually a large share of them arrive at the website accidentally through a search engine, knowing little about the context of the web page in question and perhaps as little about the Commission. The Commission still wishes to serve them in the best possible way.

²⁹ Eurobarometer 69: 4. [The European Union and its citizens](#). Fieldwork: March - May 2008. Publication: November 2008

An example of a useful localisation based on supposed previous knowledge concerns an asthma awareness campaign. On DG SANCO website³⁰, the French translator chose not to use the Commission's fairly unknown slogan but to gain synergy by using a similar and well-known one used in a French campaign:

This year's theme is "You Can Control Your Asthma".

En France, le thème de cette année est «Asthmatiques, vivez à pleins poumons».

The mention "en France" is for the benefit of Belgian or other readers, for whom the French slogan is no more familiar than the European one.

The line between cultural habits and the level of previous information is thin.

For questions of familiarity with the subject, there is no single source of information, but all reference group members believed they had a realistic picture of the level of knowledge and attitudes of their fellow countrymen.

Localising to match reader attitudes

"You can only convince Swedes through facts, not words. The web texts should explain what has been achieved, not tell how great we are."

The Swedish and Slovenian translators, in particular, mentioned that they avoided using writing styles that might be perceived as propagandistic and toned down the slightly self-congratulatory style of some originals.

However, differences between language versions are not always based on real differences in the climate of opinion in different countries. Or at least, the link is not straightforward. The extracts below are taken from the "abstract" (lead sentence) of a "homepage news" story, written originally in French:

FR (orig.)	Deux journalistes, une Française et un Danois, se partagent le premier prix de l'édition 2008 du concours «Pour la diversité, contre la discrimination» organisé par la Commission européenne.
BG	Двама журналисти – французкойка и датчанин - си поделят първата награда в конкурса „За многообразието, срещу дискриминацията“ за 2008 г., организиран от Европейската комисия.
DE	Eine Französin und ein Däne teilen sich den ersten Preis des von der Europäischen Kommission für 2008 organisierten Journalistenwettbewerbs „Für Vielfalt. Gegen Diskriminierung.“
EN	French and Danish journalists share first prize in the 2008 journalist award "For diversity, against discrimination".

³⁰ Health-EU Newsletter, May 2009.

ES	Dos periodistas, una francesa y un danés, comparten el primer premio del concurso "Por la diversidad. Contra la discriminación" de 2008, organizado por la Comisión Europea .
MT	Żewg ġurnalisti, Franċiż u Daniż, qasmu bejniethom l-ewwel premju tal-2008, imtella' mill-Kummissjoni Ewropea u ddedikat lit-tema: "Għad-diversità, kontra d-diskriminazzjoni".
NL	Een Franse en een Deense journalist delen de hoofdprijs van de wedstrijd "Verschil moet er zijn. Discriminatie niet", editie 2008, georganiseerd door de Europese Commissie .
PL	W edycji 2008 konkursu odbywającego się pod hasłem „Za różnorodnością. Przeciwn dyskryminacji.” pierwsze miejsce ex aequo zajęli Francuzka i Duńczyk.
RO	Doi jurnaliști, din Franța și Danemarca, sunt laureații ediției 2008 a concursului „Pentru diversitate. Împotriva discriminării”, organizat de Comisia Europeană .
SL	Prvo nagrado natečaja „Za različnost, proti diskriminaciji“ v organizaciji Evropske komisije za leto 2008 si delita Francozinja in Danec.
FI	Syrjinnän vastaisen journalistikilpailun pääpalkinnon menivät Ranskaan ja Tanskaan.
SV	En fransk och en dansk journalist delar på förstapriset i 2008 års upplaga av EU:s journalisttävling ”För mångfald. Mot diskriminering”.

The English, Polish, Finnish and Swedish versions avoid mentioning the Commission in the lead, but is this shared trait in the translations a reflection of similar attitudes to the EU in these three language communities, or is it just to respect a principle of EUROPA to avoid repeating the word "Commission" too often? One could also ask whether it is wise to delete the mention of the Commission in this case, where it is in a very positive anti-discrimination context, and whether this difference between language versions is acceptable.

According to the latest Standard Eurobarometer, published in December 2008³¹, 53% of EU citizens consider the EU membership of their country as a positive thing. National differences are quite strong, ranging from 27% to 80%. Poland and Sweden actually ranked relatively high, with 65% and 59% support for membership; Finland ranked below average with 48%. The UK indeed had a low percentage: 32%.

Another Eurobarometer question concerns the level of trust in the European Commission. An EU-27 average of 47% of respondents "tend to trust the Commission". This percentage is higher than average in Finland and Sweden, but average in Poland and lower than average in the UK.

³¹ Eurobarometer 70, First results.

"Tend to trust the Commission"

Belgium	64%	Hungary	56%	Bulgaria	51%
Slovakia	63%	Lithuania	55%	Ireland	50%
Netherlands	62%	Romania	55%	Italy	49%
Slovenia	61%	Czech Rep.	54%	Poland	47%
Malta	59%	Denmark	53%	France	45%
Estonia	58%	Portugal	53%	Austria	44%
Luxembourg	57%	Cyprus	53%	Germany	43%
Finland	57%	Spain	52%	Latvia	38%
Greece	56%	Sweden	52%	UK	27%

Judging from these figures, **there does not seem to be a correlation** between attitudes in different countries and not mentioning the Commission in the corresponding language version. Of the two possible explanations – that the translators are mistaken about the attitudes of their readership, or that the need of adaptation is **due more to the natural rhetorics of different languages** – the latter definitely seems more credible.

A possible explanation would be in the "masculinity" dimension in **Geert Hofstede's**³² categorisation of cultural dimensions, where "masculine" societies admire assertiveness and competition, and their opposite, "feminine" societies, admire modesty. This hypothesis could explain why for some languages, editors and translators didn't consider it necessary to highlight the Commission's role in the title, or "give a self-satisfied impression". However, Hofstede's categories do not support this hypothesis: Sweden and Finland indeed are feminine societies according to Hofstede's theory, but Poland and the UK are classified as rather masculine.

Finally, the most likely explanation is very simple. Many translators follow the principle of DG COMM of not repeating the name of the institution or of the Directorate-General responsible for the topic at hand, especially not in the third person, partly because long expressions discourage website visitors of continuing reading, and because that information is in all cases visible on the top left-hand corner of the page. In other words, deletions of this kind are not to be considered as **localising** but rather as treading.

Another factor to consider is that EUROPA readers probably do not represent the average citizen, as far as attitudes towards the EU are concerned. According to a survey conducted for DG COMM³³, the visitors are mainly students and relatively well-qualified employees (a large number of them working in public administration and education) – population groups which on average – according to the above-mentioned Eurobarometer – have a more positive attitude towards the EU than less highly-qualified workers and pensioners, for example. Translators in the reference group were aware of this, so we can assume that this is the case for all Web Unit translators.

Systematic indications from customer DGs on who are the main target groups of each web page would probably help. Although detailed data is available on where visitors come from

³² <http://www.geert-hofstede.com/index.shtml>

³³ Ernst & Young – see p.1

(through a search engine, from another Commission page, or perhaps from a national administration's page), the statistical tool currently in use does not allow to easily draw conclusions about the origin of the visitors.

It is important to remember that the objective of the communication policy is to make EU accessible to all citizens, so EUROPA should also attract new visitors, whether positive to the EU and their country's membership or not.

Web texts are typically more straightforward than other text types but, as a public institution, the Commission avoids using expressions that could be considered inappropriate or give offense. For example, as the distinction between central and eastern Europe is not particularly significant for many UK readers, English editors sometimes use the expression "Eastern Europe" in texts about recent enlargements – at least in contexts where Malta and Cyprus were less relevant to the main message. But this expression cannot be translated as such into other languages, especially those of the countries concerned. A phrase such as "enlargement to the East" could not be used in Slovenian, and not for purely geographical reasons alone; that is why the title of the homepage news item *Expanding eastwards – an EU success story* was translated as *Širitev EU je zgodba o uspehu* – "EU enlargement is a success story".

Localising the contents

The reference group translators occasionally modify the contents of the texts they translate, but this is not done as routinely as adjusting the order of elements or the style and level of details. Among the clearest examples of localisation was the news item of 17 February 2009 on RegioStars award winners, where translators of several languages included a sentence or two in their language whenever a project from the respective country had won a prize. It appeared that the translators had specially asked DG REGIO whether they could do this.

To see how this kind of localisation takes place, a selection of homepage news³⁴ were compared in their German, English, Spanish, French, Maltese, Dutch, Polish, Rumanian, Slovene, Finnish and Swedish versions.

Some examples of modifications that were made in one or a few languages only:

- In the Slovenian translation of a homepage news item reporting on cities that had participated in an environmental action, a sentence was added to mention that, in Slovenia, only Ljubljana had participated. The Finnish version mentioned cities located close to the readers of that language (Helsinki, Tallinn, Stockholm), but other versions were true to the short alphabetical city list of the original English version. (4 February 2009)
- On the eve of the Green Week 2009, a news story about the "act and adapt" campaign was localised by the Swedish translator, who added a mention of the role the Swedish

³⁴ News items published on 15.5.2008, 11.11.2008, 2.1.2009, 6.2.2009, 20.2.2009, 2.3.2009, 5.3.2009, 24.3.2009, 31.3.2009, 1.4.2009, 2.4.2009, 6.4.2009, 16.4.2009 and 22.6.2009; see p. 34.

Minister for environment had played in the campaign, and by the Finnish translator, who mentioned a Finnish project on the shortlist of environmental projects competing for an award. (22 June 2009)

- In a homepage news item about enlargement, the Polish translator had chosen to talk about the iron curtain (*żelazna kurtyna*) instead of the Cold War mentioned in the English original. She explained that the Cold War concept is not very widely used in Poland, whereas the iron curtain is an everyday expression. (20 February 2009)
- In an article about the results of a survey on quality of life, the Finnish translator replaced the title *Qualité de vie en Europe* by *Pohjoismaalaiset tyytyväisimpiä elämäänsä*, "Northern Europeans are the most satisfied with their lives" (one of the results of the study, which however was not mentioned in the short original news item). (2 January 2009)

Lighter examples of localisation in homepage news are cases where a mention of the country concerned by the language is moved on top of the text or of a list. There does not seem to be a generalised policy for this. When comparing results for the different languages, it appears that some language teams (the Dutch, Finnish, Polish and Swedish in particular) tend to introduce changes more frequently than others, while the Maltese introduce virtually no changes (see p. 34 for table). The majority of these changes cannot be described as localisation, however, but rather as treading. Another conclusion is that there is no significant difference in the number of modifications brought to news texts written translated from English and from French.

Cases of content-localising are less common than stylistic localisation. Explanations quoted include efforts to avoid creating confusion by treating readers unequally giving more details to the readers of a particular language; time pressure especially for the homepage news; and technical constraints. One translator also pointed out that readers may actually be more interested in, for example, knowing which European countries have the most severe drug problem than in the ranking of their own country.

Some of the translators suggested that they could provide links to national websites handling the same subject, as is done on the *Your Europe - Business* website³⁵, which has been created in cooperation with national administrations. This website is a concrete service for European businesses, who may feel lost when trying to find out how to proceed in another European country which usually publishes practical information in the national language(s) only.

It is clear that creating such a website about 27 countries' laws, regulations and administrations in 23 languages, and keeping the information up to date, is such a huge effort that similar new projects should not be launched without careful consideration of resources, costs and benefits. However, linking Commission websites to national ones with only short introductory texts might be feasible in other policy areas, too, and keep the need for translations within acceptable limits.

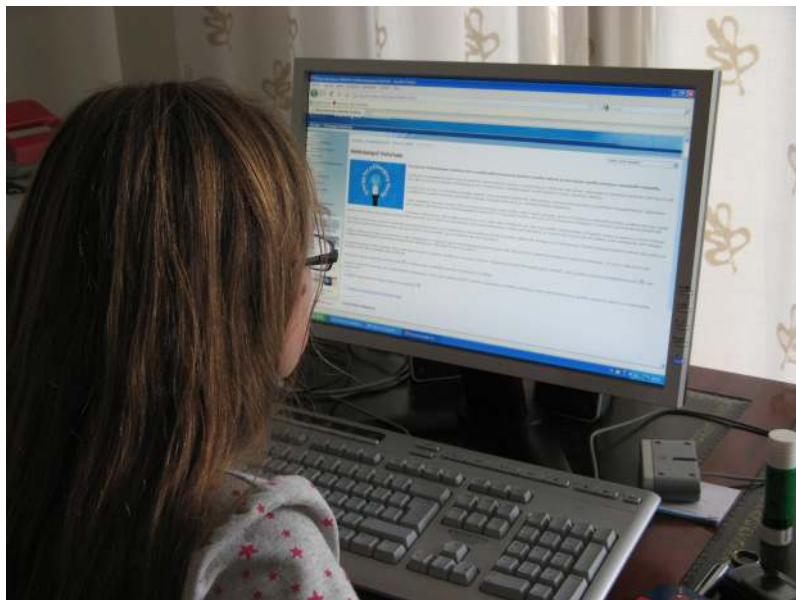
³⁵ http://ec.europa.eu/youreurope/business/index_en.htm

Elements added to (+) and left out of (–) Commission home page news during translation

	DE	EN	ES	FR	MT	NL	PL	RO	SL	FI	SV	TOTAL
Climate change – act and adapt (22.6.2009) http://ec.europa.eu/news/environment/090622_en.htm	0	Orig.	0	0	0	1 –	2 +	1 + 1 –	1 +	3 + (1 loc.)	1 + (loc.) 1 –	8 + 3 –
You're never too young to look after your health (16.4.2009) http://ec.europa.eu/news/environment/090416_1_en.htm	0	Orig.	0	1 –	1 +	0	0	0	1 +	1 –	1 + 1 –	3 + 3 –
EU and US open new chapter (6.4.2009) http://ec.europa.eu/news/external_relations/090406_1_en.htm	1 +	Orig.	1 +	1 +	0	1 + 1 –	0	2 +	2 +	2 + 1 –	2 +	12 + 2 –
Energy for the future (2.4.2009) http://ec.europa.eu/news/energy/090204_1_en.htm	1 –	Orig.	0	1 –	0	2 –	2 –	1 +	1 +	1 + 1 –	0	3 + 7 –
Adapting to a changed climate (1.4.2009) http://ec.europa.eu/news/environment/090401_1_en.htm	0	Orig.	1 +	1 +	0	0	1 + 2 –	1 –	0	1 +	0	4 + 3 –
Trademark fees slashed (31.3.2009) http://ec.europa.eu/news/business/090331_1_en.htm	1 + 1 –	Orig.	1 + 1 –	3 +	1 –	2 –	1 –	0	4 +	1 –	1 –	9 + 8 –
Five countries exceeding EU deficit limits (24.3.2009) http://ec.europa.eu/news/economy/090324_1_en.htm	2 +	Orig.	0	1 +	0	0	0	1 +	0	1 +	1 +	6 +
Careers at EU institutions (5.3.2009) http://ec.europa.eu/news/eu_explained/090305_1_en.htm	1 –	Orig.	1 + 1 –	0	0	2 –	0		3 + 1 –	1 + 3 –	1 + 1 –	6 + 9 –
Imaginer, créer, innover (2.3.2009) http://ec.europa.eu/news/eu_explained/090302_1_fr.htm	0	1 +	0	Orig.	0	1 + 3 –	0	1 –	2 +	1 +	1 –	5 + 5 –
Expanding eastwards – an EU success story (20.2.2009) http://ec.europa.eu/news/economy/090220_1_en.htm	0	Orig.	2 –	0	0	2 –	0	1 –	1 + 3 –	1 + 1 –	1 +	3 + 9 –
Concours de plumes contre l'injustice (6.2.2009) http://ec.europa.eu/news/employment/090206_1_fr.htm	0	1 –	1 + 1 –	Orig.	0	4 –	3 –	1 + 1 –	2 –	2 + 3 –	1 + 4 –	5 + 19 –
Qualité de vie en Europe (2.1.2009) http://ec.europa.eu/news/environment/090102_1_fr.htm	0	0	0	Orig.	0	0	1 + 1 –	0	0	1 + 1 – 1 ≠ (loc.)	2 –	2 + 4 –
L'Union européenne au chevet du monde (11.11.2008) http://ec.europa.eu/news/external_relations/081111_1_fr.htm	1 –	1 + 3 –	0	Orig.	0	1 + 1 –	2 +	0	1 +	3 –	1 + 1 –	6 + 9 –
€350bn for economic growth and jobs (15.5.2008) http://ec.europa.eu/news/regions/080515_1_en.htm	2 –	Orig.	0	1 + 1 –	0	1 +	2 + 3 –	0	0	0	0	4 + 6 –
TOTAL	4 + 6 –	N.A.	5 + 5 –	7 + 3 –	1 + 1 –	4 + 18 –	8 + 12 –	6 + 5 –	16 + 6 –	14 + 15 –	9 + 12 –	

Conclusions:

- DGT web translators reflect and debate a lot on the need and practices of localisation, and clearly have a profound understanding of how this should be done.
- The much-appreciated freedom to adapt texts to match the target audiences – if these are to be understood as consisting in citizens of the European country or countries where the corresponding language is generally spoken, and with a high percentage of employees and students – is used to some degree, but differences between language versions are relatively small.
- More information on the main target groups of different pages, as well as accurate statistics on the profile of visitors on particular websites would be very welcome in order to base the localisation effort on more concrete facts.
- Finally, it has to be borne in mind that many readers of EUROPA may not actually be based in Europe: for instance the website on [External relations](#) (DG RELEX) is published in English, Spanish, French and Portuguese, for the benefit of counterparts on other continents.



"We have to remember that our text may be read at home or in the office, by young or old..."

5. Web translation and Commission communication policy

There is no doubt about it: people prefer reading in their own language. The Commission's Communication DG has repeated many times that the multiplicity of languages presents a real challenge for the creation of what they term a "European public sphere", that is, a situation where European citizens from different parts of the continent dialogue with each other, follow news from other European countries with an interest close to what they feel towards their own country, and liaise with fellow Europeans in general.

All the Commission's multilingual communication efforts should be seen against this background: they aim to enable Europeans to live in a truly European information landscape, at least as far as institutional information is concerned.

Multilingual web communication is an essential part of Commission communication. One of the first claims of the new communication policy developed since 2005 was to talk "in a language citizens can understand". The evolution of Commission communication policy has inevitably influenced DGT's tasks, even though the use of languages does not receive a great deal of attention in the main communication policy documents.

In recent years, the Commission has produced three communication policy papers with a clear connection to web translation:

- **White paper on a European communication policy**, [COM\(2006\) 35](#)

The White paper points out that Europe suffers from the lack of a common "public sphere", with national media focusing on national news, and that language barriers are the main reason for this. The EUROPA website, however multilingual, cannot alone solve the problem.

- **Communicating Europe in partnership**, [COM\(2007\) 568](#)

This document highlights the right of European citizens to participate in democratic life. Concerning the use of languages on EUROPA, the document states: "In a situation of limited resources, trade-offs between increasing the amount of information published and broadening the audience appear inevitable, and will require a coherent approach."

- **Communicating about Europe via the Internet ("the Internet Strategy")**, [SEC\(2007\)1742](#)

Following the approach set out in the previous document, this paper states that EUROPA pages "will be translated in line with the Commission's communication priorities and the selection of languages at each site requires a coherent approach linked to the intended target audience". This paper recommends that this should be explained on EUROPA sites in a language policy statement.

The 2007 Internet Strategy also stresses the interactive nature of the Internet and the active habits of its users. In order to attract more visitors, EUROPA could, and probably will, offer interactive possibilities and aim to communicate with the widest range of people.

The Commission's Corporate Communication Statement of March 2009 does not elaborate on the translation issue, but briefly states that "the Commission's information and communication policy is based on transparency, accessibility, inclusiveness, **multilingualism** and cultural

diversity", and that the Commission reaches out to Europe's citizens seeking, among other objectives, to communicate with them by addressing them in the official languages.

Along the lines of these documents, two main questions arise in the web translation field:

- 1. As we can't translate everything into all languages, how to manage the trade-off between the amount of content and the number of languages?**
- 2. Which interactive solutions can EUROPA use multilingually to attract web users? For instance, how to organise discussion forums in a multilingual website?**

A third very relevant question reflected upon by web translators is

- 3. How to write, in each particular language, in a way which attracts readers to EUROPA and is credible in the eyes of readers? What are the ideal ways to take into account the culture linked to each language?**

At a Commission press conference to launch the multilingual Presseurop portal³⁶ on 25 May 2009, it was claimed that the question of translations has stopped many good projects for creating a European public space. The wording was unintentionally tendentious – after all, translations do not *stop* projects but *enable* them, although not always at the speed hoped for; and it is a fundamental characteristic of the European population, namely our linguistic diversity, that makes these translations necessary. The European public space needs translations, and DGT efforts play a part in creating that space.

However important, the linguistic quality of a website is only a part of the solution for reaching web users. Quoting Sissel Marie Rike: "*A website should be seen in a holistic perspective where organization, graphics, colours, symbols etc are individual elements integrated in the message and constitute parts of the rhetorics used.*"³⁷

1. The necessary trade-off: what to translate and into which languages?

The size and complexity of EUROPA would be problematic even if it were monolingual. According to DG COMM figures, EUROPA includes some 6 million documents. Directorates-General are responsible for their own publishing activities, and no percentage is available on the language coverage of these sites. One thing is sure, however: full multilingualism of all EUROPA contents would be absolutely impossible, taking into account not only the amount of material published but also its dynamism. Maintaining and updating a complex web portal requires a lot of work, and rationalisation efforts cannot deal with language policy in isolation. The top level pages have been recently reorganised, and the renewed website was launched in autumn 2009.

³⁶ <http://www.presseurop.eu/>

³⁷ See p. 8.

Priority rules for web translations have been set in the Communication on demand management SEC(2006) 1489 final, and last fine-tuned in June 2009. According to the latest plan, the order of importance for documents to be translated into all languages for EUROPA is the following:

- EUROPA homepage
- Commission homepage (static parts)
- Interinstitutional top pages
- Commission top pages (including the homepage news)
- Current political priorities
- Citizens' summaries

For the following websites a smaller number of languages can be accepted, depending on the target group:

- Thematic portals
- Thematic websites
- Commissioners' websites
- DGs' websites

Detailed advice on language coverage on Commission sites is given in the Commission's [Information Providers' Guide](#). This document points out that "the language issue is one of the first aspects to be tackled when planning or revamping a site", and that the initial policy should be reviewed regularly. It identifies the documents which should be translated into all languages, loosely in accordance with the demand management strategy.

Commissioners' websites have become much more multilingual over the last few years, although usually only part of the material is multilingual. In addition to becoming more multilingual, Commissioners' websites have also developed in a more interactive direction, as further explained in Chapter 5.2.

Evolution of multilingualism on Commissioners' websites during the existence of the Web Unit

	January 2006	November 2009
1 language	7	1
2 languages	7	7
3 languages	4	2
4 languages	3	6
5–19 languages	0	0
20 or more	4	11
Total	25	27

Taking into account the generally accepted vision of websites as services where users come to carry out a transaction or to find a specific piece of information, the Commission probably gains more in focusing on the actual service pages intended for citizens, instead of general presentation of DGs' work or organisation charts.

"Multilingualism is one element of efficient communication, but not in isolation. There is a more important trade-off between the number of pages published and of the pages you can keep up to date and manage."

As far as language use is concerned, EUROPA should ideally match the choice of languages with the profile of the target audience in each individual case. This requires, as a first step, that the intended or actual website user group is known. As mentioned above, in many cases the intended target group is not known by the Commission.

The actual reader groups are even less known. DG COMM gathers statistics of the number of visitors to different pages and on their navigation path on EUROPA, but the data collected is unfortunately not detailed enough to allow to draw meaningful conclusions. The results of the recent external evaluation of EUROPA³⁸, which consisted in a survey for the portal's users, indicate that students and employees are the biggest user groups, and that two thirds of them visit the portal regularly. That is useful information, although one could ask whether the respondents were representative of EUROPA users; regular users may have been more motivated to reply than occasional visitors.

DG COMM statistics on the pages most viewed show that **the most consulted pages are those offering services** such as Eures (job mobility; 6% of all pages viewed in September 2009), IATE (terminology, 3.7%), taxation and customs pages (especially customs, 3%), and Eurostat (statistics, 1.4 %). It is noteworthy that of these services, the Eures pages, which are clearly intended for the "general public", are fully multilingual, while the customs and statistics pages, which probably have a more specialised professional readership, are mostly trilingual. This indicates that the multilingualism efforts on EUROPA are quite well directed, although not yet perfect. – IATE, the terminology website, which is most probably used by translators and public sector professionals, has a multilingual search form – not to mention the essentially multilingual contents.

The ability of EUROPA users to read the different languages is one of the most important criteria. The above-mentioned evaluation concludes, on the basis of a reader survey, that nine out of ten EUROPA users are happy with its current language coverage. Available information on language skills of Europeans is also mostly based on surveys, pending the European indicator of language competence and the results of Commission surveys on foreign language skills. However, based on the 2006 Eurobarometer on Europeans and their languages³⁹ and Eurostat statistics on EU population in 2009⁴⁰, 60% of Europeans have one of the five biggest EU official languages as their mother tongue:

German	17%
English	12%
Italian	12%
French	11%
Spanish	8%
TOTAL	60%

No comprehensive data are available for the other languages, but as 98% of Polish nationals, 96% of Dutch and 95% of the Romanian Eurobarometer respondents declared the national

³⁸ See page 3

³⁹ http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_243_en.pdf

⁴⁰ <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/portal/page/portal/population/introduction>

language to be their mother tongue, and 56% of Belgians said Dutch was their mother tongue, we could add the following estimates:

* Polish	7%
* Dutch	4%
* Romanian	4%
TOTAL	75%

Assuming that, of the remaining 25%, an average of 38% know English as a foreign language (as stated in the Eurobarometer), some 84% of EU citizens would manage to obtain information on EUROPA reading either their mother tongue or English as a foreign language.

$$38\% \text{ of } 25\% = 9.5\%$$

$$75\% + 9.5\% = 84.5\%$$

In fact, knowledge of English is rising steadily, with a clear majority of young Europeans learning it at school. Adding to this figure those Europeans who know one of the above-mentioned languages other than English as a foreign language, one could conclude that nearly 90% of EU citizens would be well informed using eight languages.

However, the remaining of 10% of EU citizens left out of the information cycle number almost 50 million in absolute terms. Rationalisation efforts are therefore bound to be based on criteria such as the profile of users of particular web pages, rather than on excluding those official languages that do not belong to a club of the three, five or eight most widely understood languages.

In addition, although the style used on EUROPA is generally quite easy to read, **foreign language skills acquired at school may not be sufficient for getting informed about complex matters, or for participating in discussions about them.**

The proportion of people using the Internet varies greatly between European countries, between age groups and between socio-economic groups. Therefore, it is useful for the Commission to know **who actually has access to EUROPA**. A Eurobarometer indicates that Greece, Bulgaria and Romania have the lowest proportion of inhabitants using the Internet for personal purposes, while Scandinavian countries and the Netherlands have the highest proportion⁴¹. Proportions differ to some extent if only professional use is taken into account: in Slovenia, 78% of Internet users have professional purposes, while in Ireland a small majority uses the Internet for personal purposes only.

⁴¹ Flash Eurobarometer Flash 241, Information society as seen by EU citizens, published in November 2008

Internet users (sample of countries) according to Eurobarometer Flash 241

Country	Have used Internet in the last three months (%)	Share of those Internet users who use it in their daily work (%)
Denmark	91	63
Sweden	85	64
Netherlands	82	54
Ireland	76	47 (lowest)
Germany	71	55
Slovenia	69	78 (highest)
EU27	68	56
Greece	50	54
Bulgaria	49	52
Romania	41	55

These figures give some indication as to who reads EUROPA. Translators make their further assumptions case-by-case on the basis of the context, the contents of the material to be translated, or on common sense.

2. Multilingual discussion forums – the real test of barrier-breaking

"What we need is one multilingual discussion forum where users can define their profile and only see entries in the languages they can read."

The Commission's websites focus on satisfying need for information, but they offer some possibilities for active participation: they host several discussion forums and organise on-line consultations on policy initiatives. It is also possible to request information material, to register for events etc.

Discussion forums and other interactive sites, such as blogs with readers' comments and microblogs, are features of Web 2.0, meaning that the web is developing in a shared, participatory direction. People used to consult websites primarily to look for information or carry out tasks, but increasingly they also participate actively, sharing opinions or knowledge.

The Commission's ambition to dialogue with citizens could benefit from this development. Until now, efforts have consisted in some Commissioners' blogs – in November 2009, seven commissioners kept a blog, four of which were interactive – discussion forums (particularly the Debate Europe⁴²) as well as the odd quiz or opinion poll. In spite of the attractiveness of

⁴² http://europa.eu/debateeurope/index_en.htm

these possibilities, DG COMM, which is leading the on-going reform of EUROPA, has taken the wise decision to advance carefully.

Interactive web puts much more pressure on the organisation of translation. It is not enough to translate the Commission's message into as many languages as possible: participants' opinions and questions should also be translated, as well as the Commission's and other participants' reactions - and this should be done very quickly.

This kind of interaction is a test for European multilingualism in all the meanings of the word (co-existence of many languages in a community; people knowing many languages; services provided in many languages). If people have learned a vehicular language, they can communicate without language mediators. If this is not possible, translators can help. Using translation services is less time-consuming than learning a language, but on a highly active website the time taken for translations should be extremely short, and communication takes place more naturally in a common language, typically in a simplified form of English even if this limits the scope of expression.

During an on-line session of Debate Europe, web translators were invited to participate as moderators for their language. They also translated some interesting messages into English to be posted in the English-language forum and to bring a pan-European dimension to the debates. However, most participants from non-vehicular languages preferred to join in with the more lively forums.

This phenomenon has two sides: European-wide interaction does take place – on the English channel – but those wishing to communicate in another language run the risk of being left out of the action.

On the non-vehicular language channels, discussions often take place between nationals of the same country and remain national in perspective. One could ask why someone would go to a Commission website to participate in a national debate, when there are many national websites that could be used for that purpose. These questions were already asked by **Ruth Wodak** and **Scott Wright**, who in 2005 studied the discussions taking place on the Commission's "Future of Europe" forum⁴³. No perfect solution has been brought yet to the challenges of a multilingual discussion forum.

Currently, participants of the less-used language forums on EUROPA are occasionally referred by moderators to a related, more lively debate on the English-language forum. This seems to be the only reasonable thing to do when there are just a handful of participants in a given language. A suggestion along these lines was made by a French participant to the Debate Europe "intercultural dialogue" forum in 2008: *everyone should express themselves in a single forum in any language they can use; when someone replies to an entry in another language, they should summarise the contents of the original message, to help their readers understand the point of their posting*. This system, which was to some extent used in the "Have your say" forum⁴⁴ on Commissioner Orban's website, for example, would be supplemented by a machine translation device, and have the extra benefit of people coming into contact with several foreign languages and encouraging them to read entries in languages they understand even partially.

⁴³ *The European Union in Cyberspace: Democratic Participation via Online Multilingual Discussion Boards*, in *The Multilingual Internet*, Brenda Danet and Susan C. Herring (ed.), Oxford University Press 2007.

⁴⁴ <http://forums.ec.europa.eu/multilingualism/en/>

DGT web translators also regret the "monolingual ghettos" of EUROPA discussion forums. Some suggested a multilingual forum where users can define their profile in order to see entries only in the languages they can read, and/or a machine translation tool for understanding. However, offering a machine translation tool on Commission web pages, or linking to existing software in the Internet, would raise many questions related to intellectual property as well as to the image of the Commission and of DGT, who would not like to create any confusion as to what is translated by the DGT and what is the result of an ad-hoc machine translation. Moreover, the quality of machine translation tools varies greatly across language pairs, and these tools are still virtually non-existent for many languages.

Before deciding what language arrangements are appropriate for Commission forums, it is worth asking what purpose the forums serve. If they are created to enable interaction between citizens and the Commission, Commission officials have to participate actively, replying to questions and presenting the institution's point of view. This also requires summarising the messages systematically to Commission management, as well as translations for the Commission postings.

If on the other hand the purpose is to allow people to communicate between themselves without the Commission's interference and thus promote the European public sphere, it should be accepted that the discussion is likely to happen only in a couple of languages – or a rapid translation service should be set up. Of course, a monolingual system might drive some participants away, and lower the quality of contributions. This is a good demonstration of the fact that the respect of multilingualism does not necessarily mean using systematically all the official languages, but the purpose of the action has to be considered.

Several translators pointed out that blogs are a better way of starting a discussion than debate forums. Commissioner Wallström's⁴⁵ English-language blog is quite lively, but no translations are available. On the other hand, the Web Unit provides translations for Commissioner Barrot's and Commissioner Borg's bloggish "Thought of the week" and "Personally speaking" corners, but these are not interactive.

The new [Presseurop](#) portal, created by a consortium following a call for tenders by DG COMM, plans to offer discussion forums in addition to translated articles from all EU countries, initially in ten languages and later in all official EU languages. It will be interesting to follow how they will manage the multilingualism issue. Interactivity can be more spontaneous on an external website which is not in the hands of the Commission.

Apart from its opinion-related sites, EUROPA offers a range of other interactive services: the [Internal Market Information Service](#) is now being piloted for national administrations and is translated into all official languages by DGT Web Unit. People can also register EU recruitment competitions on the [EPSO website](#) and organisations can submit project [proposals](#) online. These developments are likely to raise the demand for translation of interactive web pages, and DGT's level of involvement.

⁴⁵ Margot Wallström is Vice-President of the Barroso I Commission, and responsible for communication.

3. How to translate

According to all studies on web users, people come to websites to find information or to carry out a transaction, and only rarely to see what an organisation is active in. Consequently, the visitor on EUROPA is very probably looking for a specific piece of information, not wishing to find out what the Commission is busy doing that day. If the portal is to serve this primary purpose, the sought-for information has to be easily accessible. Current efforts to improve EUROPA target its structure, the size of the different sites and of course language coverage, but wording, i.e. translations, are also crucial for finding one's way to EUROPA in the first place, and then for finding one's way around.

Addressing the non-EU specialist web user, in line with the Commission's communication policy, is a challenge especially for those translators who have worked with official documents for many years, but it is also a challenge to translation requesters.

All DGT efforts to liaise with Commission web editors are useful, because they enable an exchange of views on the intended audience and required style, and DGT Web Translation Unit can share its expertise on the best way to approach different cultures. Then, it is up to the translators to find the best terminology, syntax and other features which help EUROPA to attract readers, to encourage them to read the whole page, to inform them and while doing all this, to leave them with a convincing image of the European Commission. Knowing the priorities and policies of the Commission is of a great help to translators, but in many cases, being familiar with the EU terminology is not necessary.

The [European Parliament](#) currently has its homepage news drafted in 23 languages by a team of editors, each in their language, based on a synopsis provided by the communication unit. Each editor submits a draft or bullet points to the head of unit, then, once these have been approved, proceeds to draft the story. Some stories are very similar in different languages, quite like the language versions of Commission's homepage news, but others, especially longer ones, are in fact independent articles and may include facts, events or people particularly relevant to the readers of that language. The rest of material on the Parliament's website is translated integrally by in-house or freelance translators. This is another way of organising multilingual web communication.

6. Editing, treading and other efforts to improve the Commission's communication on the web

The Web Translation Unit was created partly in order to further the Commission's efforts to communicate better with European citizens. The translators are very much aware of this and are committed to facilitating the dialogue and debate. Their efforts often go beyond providing a clear and attractive translation.

Editing

DGT has an unmatched amount of expertise across all EU official languages and many others, including those in which Commission originals are written. Good originals are essential for producing good translations, and that is the main reason why DGT tries to actively help its customers do more to improve Commission websites' quality, encouraging them to send their text for editing at DGT before sending them for translation.

The editing function is an important part of the Web Unit and is often regarded almost as a first step in the translation process. Of all texts translated by the Web Unit, approximately 30% are first edited by the English team; a few French-language originals are edited as well. The purpose of editing is to improve the quality of source texts, making them more concise, readable and reader-oriented, in other words more suitable for the Internet environment. An added benefit of the editing process is that edited texts are often shorter, which means that the translation resources that would have been dedicated to them are free to be used elsewhere.

Ideally, at least for longer texts, requesters are urged to consult the Web Unit in advance, and the [Intranet page of the Web Unit](#) (an excellent model of a web page built with the user in mind) encourages them to do so: *"Want to get your web pages right? **(before sending them for translation)** - We can help! **Contact** us for linguistic advice / editing of your original texts. We can **meet you to explain more** / give a short **presentation**."*

The feedback from customers has generally been very positive. There have been occasional negative experiences, where the translation requester has not been happy with the big changes suggested by the web editors, but the positive experiences by far outnumber them.

Readers sometimes react positively, too, as this personal comment about the Citizen's summaries on [a blog](#) shows: "Maybe I just haven't found something like this before, but for me it just felt like the citizen-friendly future has arrived at the European Commission."

DGT web editors' work has improved not only the individual texts to be published on EUROPA, but also the quality of original texts coming from the client DGs. Feedback from DGT to customers has to some extent influenced the way Commission web texts are conceived and produced. The technique of copying and pasting from administrative documents, which once was considered an acceptable way of creating web pages, is becoming rare.

The English-language web editors are aware that their texts will be read by people of a variety of origins. They aim at differentiating between websites that will be translated into all

languages and those which will be published in some languages only. When they know the text will be read by many non-native English speakers, they try to write in a general way. In contrast, when all language versions have been requested, they write from a UK/Irish perspective, trusting that readers of other nationalities will consult the website in their own language and not in English.

Trediting

"The translator is a mediator between the requester and the reader, and has to respect both."

Even when the texts are not edited by the Web Unit editing team, translators adapt them in the process of translating to make them easier to read, possibly shorter or more suitable for the web environment. They use a specific term, *trediting*, to designate this translation mode.

The degree of trediting depends largely on the quality and style of the original, but also on the time available. Web translators feel that they have grown bolder and faster in their editing over time. If problems arise around editing while translating, they are usually about timing: it is too late to change the text, as the requester is eager to publish quickly.

It is easier to omit elements than add new ones and this may be one reason why translations are often shorter than the original – that is, when the original has not been edited at DGT. When the original source text has already been edited, the outcome is often the opposite, with the edited English original being the shortest of all.

Heavy trediting occasionally leads to unexpected situations when the requester later introduces modifications to the text. Especially when the translator of the first version is absent, introducing the modifications in the tredited text can be quite cumbersome.

Like the editing service requested by clients, proactive trediting by translators is also generally appreciated provided the requester is consulted in advance. Only one case of trediting going wrong was mentioned. In that case the translator had been mistaken about the meaning of a link word and only noticed this when the page was published. She promptly rectified the matter over the phone with the customer.

Some web translators still hesitate on how much they are supposed – or allowed – to tredit the texts. No written rules have been given, but there have been many discussions and workshops on the subject. There is a consensus between the Web Unit's management, who trust the translators' judgment, and the translators themselves. Peer control also plays a role, as everything is revised in the Web Unit. Trediting involves more responsibility than standard translating, and although translators don't complain about the lack of detailed instructions, some of them would welcome common guidelines on their freedom and responsibility.

Advice to requesters

The English editors regularly give presentations on good web writing to Commission DGs, which also provide an opportunity to develop working relationships and explain what editing and translation services are offered by DGT. They also offer advice on particular website projects.

Work on a website on development policy was one of the positive experiences: during their first contacts about translating the website, the requester was not favourable to editing, but gradually came to appreciate the point of view of DGT editors. Their English web pages⁴⁶ are now becoming clearer and easier to manage: the texts are shorter and more to the point.

Another success story are the 56 pages on the emergency number 112 and how it works in different countries, aimed at a broad audience and sent to DGT for translation. The English editors helped squeeze all the important things in just five pages⁴⁷ instead of the dozens of pages the file included during the first contacts.

Web translators believe that their proactive habits of contacting translation requesters, asking questions about the contents and suggesting better formulations have also had a positive impact on incoming originals. This is probably easier with web texts than with legal or administrative texts, because the approval procedures for modifications in informative texts are lighter than they are for official documents, and because most officials admit more readily their lack of experience in writing for the web than question their skills in drafting more classical types of documents.

Influence of edited originals on translations

"I believe that the English style guides influence the way DGT Web translators translate."

According to the translators, the 30% of web texts coming for translation which are first edited by the English web editing team are more concise and include fewer mistakes and unclear messages than the un-edited originals. The reference group of translators considered that English editing is crucial for the quality of their work, because it improves the originals' general clarity, "that is, unless we all agree to do the extra bit of work in starting with raw material and simultaneously editing and translating it into our language". It doesn't help the translator transfer the message into the reader's culture, however, because editing serves to make the text either culturally neutral or in some cases British. Thus the benefits of editing appear to be greater for the readers of the original version than for the translators.

On the other hand, translators consider that the edited originals are often too telegraphic and lack the references necessary for translating. The un-edited original remains available in *Dossier Manager*⁴⁸ as a reference document for translators, and they often find useful to have a look at it. For example, English editors sometimes remove the object or subject of a

⁴⁶ http://ec.europa.eu/development/index_en.cfm

⁴⁷ http://preprod.europa.info.cec.eu.int/information_society/activities/112/index_en.htm

⁴⁸ See p. 21

sentence, and the result may be snappy and work in English but cannot be translated as such into most other languages. An example of an edited sentence which is untranslatable as such is "It has been decided". The passive voice cannot be used in that way in, for instance Slovenian, and the translator has to look for background information to know *who* decided.

When English editors replace Community terminology with other terms – if for example *Green paper* has been turned into *policy document*; or *Directive* into *European law* – the translator may wish to use the more exact term in the translation and look for the needed information in the un-edited version.

7. Conclusions and lessons learned

Translators at work

After the interviews and after getting to know the work done by DGT web translators it appears obvious that there is a healthy "internal entrepreneur" spirit in the Unit. Translators are particularly pro-active, assume personal responsibility for their work, and feel encouraged to do so. This is probably one of the main reasons behind the success of the Web Unit made explicit by, for instance, the DGT customer satisfaction survey, where as many as 94.4% of respondents said they were always or usually satisfied with DGT web translation services.

Web translators are of the opinion that, in their current job, they are serving European citizens in a direct and tangible way. Other underlying reasons for the positive attitude seem to be the greater degree of freedom allowed for many of the translations, the feeling of piloting a new type of translation, and the encouraging management style of the Unit, not to mention variety and the lively pace of short work assignments. Most of these features are inherent to the particular tasks of the Web Unit.

How different is web translation?

The web environment makes special demands – particularly regarding the terminology to be used – because web texts compete for attention and credibility with other sources of information in a very different way than written material or particularly legislation.

The practices of localisation are well known by DGT web translators. However, localisation is useful in other contexts too, and not only in web translation.

And finally, different technical tools distinguish web translation from other genres.

How to prioritise?

The usefulness of web translations can be evaluated from two different angles: from a demand point of view, valuing the importance of individual pages by the number of visitors on each page and in each language version (*ex-post*), or from the institutional angle of importance given to each document or category, as is done in the Translation strategy (*ex-ante*).

Both points of view are useful. However, the former may suffer from the way language versions are presented on EUROPA, with visitors being easily led to an English page even when they would prefer another available language. A solution would lie in a change of structure of EUROPA, but this is a very complex matter and beyond the remit of DGT. An easier solution would be to make the language choice menu on each page more visible.

With all the expertise DGT has about communication patterns and environments in different countries, it would be well placed to give guidance on an effective multilingual website

policy. There are many factors which influence language policy on different Commission websites (individual choices; staffing and budget available; occasional demands for more language versions...), but disparate solutions have the disadvantage of giving a heterogeneous image and of creating further demands for full multilingualism even in cases where it is not objectively necessary.

Presence on the web

Because the Internet is becoming more and more interactive, and because the Commission wishes to reach young generations who have grown up using social media, it must seriously reflect on the question of multilingual interactivity on EUROPA. The Commission is examining all options for making discussion forums and blogs purposeful. Web translators moderating discussion forums was a good start, and helped translators to see all sides of the multilingualism issue: what level of language ability is needed to communicate without translation, when translating is useful in spite of the time it takes, and which language(s) users choose to use and on what grounds.

The Internet unites people over national borders, a bit like the EU, and it is also about free movement. Although the famous digital divide is on its way to being bridged, the language-skill divide is still there: according to several opinion polls, the lack of language skills is the most common reason preventing interested Europeans from using their right to move and work freely within the Union. Thanks to web translation, at least the movement of information will not be hindered by missing language skills.

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