NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION ON COMMERCIAL WEBSITES - ISSUES IN WEBSITE LOCALIZATION

Assistant PhD Candidate Cristian LAKO
"Petru Maior" University of Târgu-Mureş

Abstract

This paper is a continuation of my previous research in the sphere of translation studies, text typology and localization. In this paper I focus on issues specific to the localization of commercial webpages and analyse elements of text and non-text, what needs to be translated and adapted from the perspective of the localization process.

Keywords: non-verbal communication, e-text, localization, non-text, translation, non-translation, cultural management,

In one of my previous papers I have looked at several definitions for the term "text" and the one that best suits web-text or e-text in my opinion is that of Kallmeyer (cited in Nord, 2005:) who defines *text* as "the totality of communicative signals used in a communicative interaction".

This definition considers *text* any communication as a production and as a whole, and I think it is the closest definition to describe the complexity of communication as process and product on websites. In this case *text* is seen with regard to websites as the totality of a given webpage, including on one hand the text itself (the verbal component of the website) and all graphics, animations, videos and webpages layout on the other hand.

I have to point out that Nord (2005: 16) defines text as "a communicative action which can be realized by a combination of verbal and non-verbal means." However, we have to distinguish for the pupose of this paper, between *non-verbal* as delimited by Nord and *non-verbal* as the totality of all the other elements of a webpage. Nord views non-verbal text as elements of composition and layout, suprasegmental features (puctuation, using underline or italics), omission, irony, intentionality etc., while illustrations, diagrams and drawings as supplements or additional non-verbal means. Nord admits that non-verbal may transmit more information than the verbal component of a text (2005). This goes along the lines of the saying - used very often in marketing and mass media: "A picture is worth a thousand words." and „Seeing is believing."

For instance, a brand logo will communicate a lot about who is behind the communication. A certain brand falls (or not) in the category of „background knowledge" context due to the branding process. However, a brand involves a lot of prior investment in terms of communicating. Some websites are trying to build on a picture that is already telling a story. On websites, often there is an „Our clients" section which displays as pictures the logos of the most important clients and nothing else. The communicated message and intentionality is „Buy our services as prestigious companies already have. If we are good enough for them, definitely we are a good fit for you as well." Let us look at the following webpage:
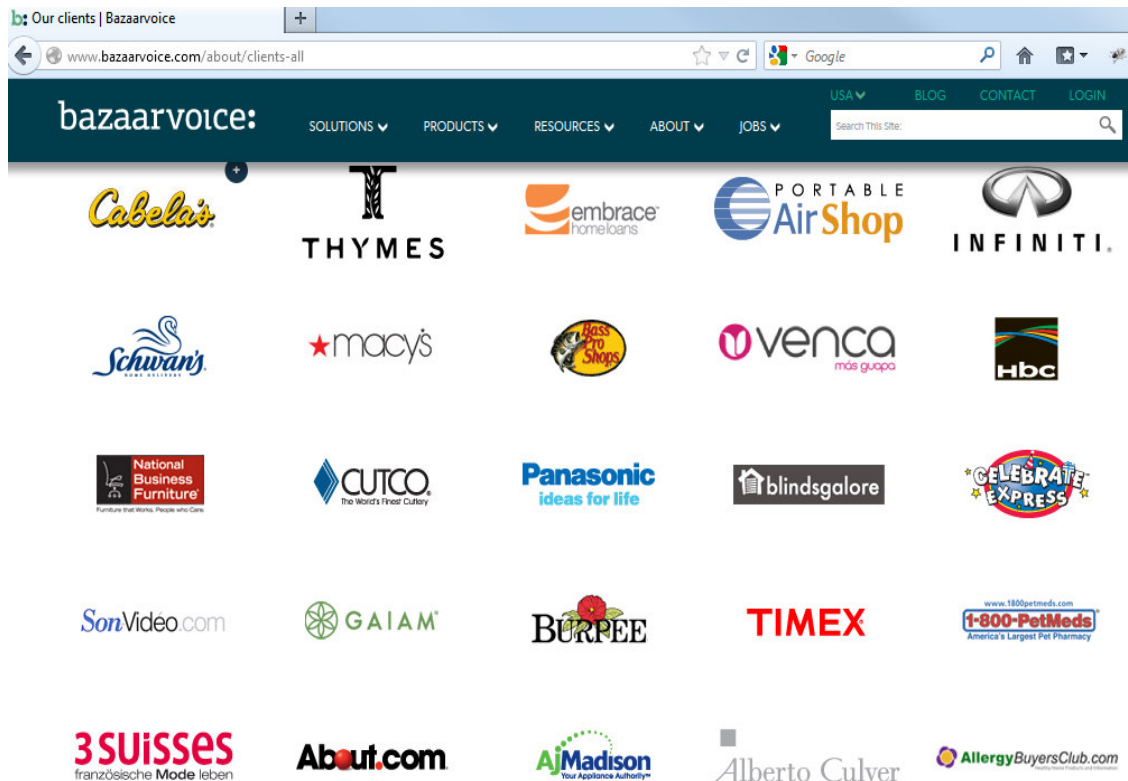
Figure 1: *Example of "Our clients" webpage*

It is obvious, that apart from the interface text, at the top, which is translated only once for the whole website, so it is not particular to this one webpage of this website, the translator does not need to translate anything. Still, localization is needed. If bazaarvoices.com were to localize their webpage for the Romanian market, most logos from above would be irrelevant. Relevant are only the logos of the companies that are globally established: Panasonic, Infinity, Timex and About.com, for instance. But this is relative as the "reader" of this page may be aware or not about a particular car, watch or information service brand, so the message is understood only if the Web user previously showed interest in those types of products or services. The localizer, to bring closer the webpage to the understanding of the targeted user, the Romanian, would delete irrelevant company logos and replace them with brands that are well-known in Romania, that is, only if the company established a business relationship with the respective Romanian companies.

For the sake of simplicity and clearer delimitations I will refer to the **text** itself as the **verbal component** while all of the other website elements (**non-text**) will be enclosed under the term **non-verbal component**. These two components are often referred to as **content.**

This division goes along the lines suggested by Nielsen (cited in Santini:2010a), for the classification of websites based on two-dimensional genre model: in terms of a traditional text and in terms of the communication channel- the Web; and includes website menus, sitemaps and internal links. Bateman (ibid) uses a tri-dimensional axis for categorizing websites: content, form, functionality. Functionality is what Nielsen put under the navigation features of a website. I found this distinction useful to my purpose and will refer to it in my paper as the **functionality component.** A forth main component of the website, I consider

important, is its **technical component.** Whereas the first two components can refer both to webpages and websites, the functionality and technical components are more practical to be used at website level only.

The verbal component

In my previous paper I looked at different text types based on the traditional way of seeing text, that is, prior to the advent of the Web. Bruce (cited in Mehler, 2010) proposed two main genres for text: **social genre** and **cognitive genre**. Other bi-dimensional categorizations of webpages can be **nominal** and **verbal types**, and I propose a third two-dimensional model that of c**orporate type** and **non-corporate**.

The cognitive and social genre goes along the lines of Santini(2010b) which calls them "rethorical genres", respectivelly "web genres". The cognitive/rethorical genres have the features of the traditional printed text typology. As for the social genre, Santini(ibid) proposes 7 other genres of which correspond more or less to actual types of websites on the Web:

Table 5.1 Genre palette

Rhetorical Genres (A.K.A. Cognitive genres or text types)
(1) Descriptive_narrative
(2) Explicatory_informational
(3) Argumentative_persuasive
(4) Instructional

Traditional BBC web genres
(5) BBC DIYs
(6) BBC editorials
(7) BBC short biographies
(8) BBC feature articles

Novel web genres
(9) Blogs
(10) Eshops
(11) FAQs
(12) Online newspaper front pages
(13) Listings
(14) Personal home pages
(15) Search pages

Figure 2*: Santini's genres*

Next I will look at the types of websites acknowledge by most web users. Most websites fall in one of the three following categories:
- content-based sites (offering information)
- product- or service-based sites (commercial websites)
- social sites (social genre)

Other classifications of websites list thirteen types of websites, which in terms of numbers is pretty close to that of genres found by Santini. These website types are (Shelly 2010: 67-70):

- portal (offers several services under the same brand(email, calendar, news, search)
- news (the online equivalent of mass media entities(newspapers, radio, Television)
- informational (websites that acknowledge information of general interest such as taxes, decisions made at governmental or local level, research result etc.)
- business/marketing (websites belonging to businesses)
- blog (hybrid diary/guide website; content may be of one individual or content can be contributed by users as well)
- wiki (websites created mainly by the collective effort of the site visitors)
- online social network (websites that allow users to create public profiles that can be used to access other peoples public profile, to share opinions, use chatrooms games etc.)
- educational (websites that teach the user on various subjects)
- entertainment (online equivalent of television, but with extra interactivity added)
- advocacy (lobby, cause, opinion websites)
- web-application (online software working directly from a web browser, for instance a photo editor)
- content aggregator (websites that gather Web content from different online sources for reuse or resale)
- personal (websites created and maintained by individuals)

Search engine sites may be considered a specialized type of web-application.

The same as genres intermingle, so do websites fall into several of the above categories. Looking back at Santini's genres I think the reality of the internet requires at least two more important genre types:

- administrative page
- navigation/interconection structure

The *administrative genre* can be subcategorized into user administration pages and corporate administration pages. User administration pages are those pages when a user, for instance, signs up for a certain service (a free email service) by filling in the necessary fields of the sign up form. Corporate administration pages are pages from which a non-technical person can directly input/edit/change/delete content. These are also known as CMS (Content management system). These pages may be needed to be multilingual and the content administrator would get training on how to use the CMS.

CMS is also a good tool for handling all the multilingual content. The translator/ localizer can work directly in the CMS and preview the page with the translated text right the way.

I consider the navigation structure of a website as a separate genre, and while it can be found on all of the pages of a website, it is a unitary structure, delimited from the rest of the site both as functionality and visually. Navigation structure consists of the menu, sitemap and main outgoing links. In one word, everything that is recurring on each of the webpages within the same website. Navigation structure is only one part of the user interface (UI).

Also, still looking back at Santini's table, I am not happy with delimiting the front page genre to newspapers only. The term "front page" would be much more permissive especially that each website strives to look unique (sometimes even between localised versions of the same source website.)

The non-verbal component (non-text)

As part of the non-verbal component one has to take into consideration Nord's delimitation between intratextual and extratextual dimensions. Some scholars would refer to this as context, in general. Nord (2005: 41) proposed the following scheme of analysing the intratextual and extratextual factors:
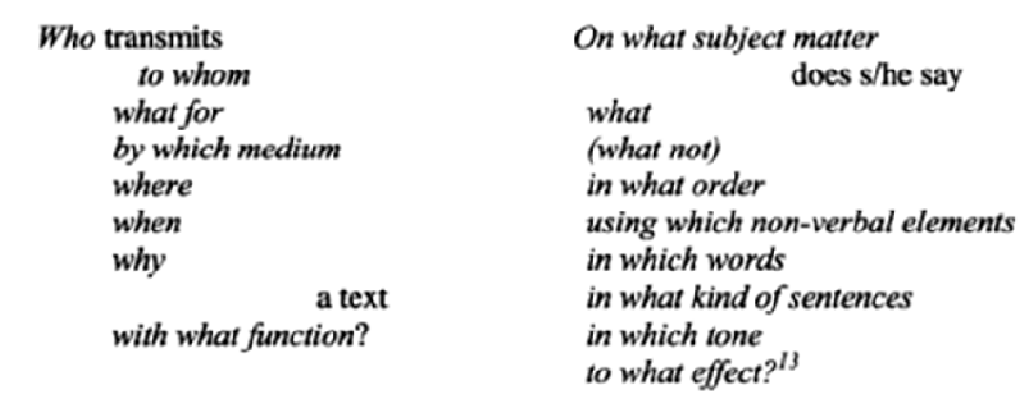
Who transmits	*On what subject matter*
to whom	*does s/he say*
what for	*what*
by which medium	*(what not)*
where	*in what order*
when	*using which non-verbal elements*
why	*in which words*
a text	*in what kind of sentences*
with what function?	*in which tone*
	to what effect?[13]

Figure 3. *Intratextualand extratextual factors*

First, I will analyse the extratextual factors:

- **sender** – In the case of websites, and especially commercial websites, it is very important for the receiver to know who exactly is behind the business. When translating and localizing, it is important to keep the same values around a brand for instance. There are many brands that already contain a communication message through the name chosen. In localization, brand name will never be translated. As they are not translated the translator will have to explicitate the message borne by the company name in the initial language/culture. Before branding the role of the translator/marketer as an intermediary is crucial. After successful branding the company name and brand stand for almost the same message as in the source language/culture. In localization although the translator plays a major role, he/she is irrelevant to the receiver as the user is interested in the initiator of the text (website in our case). If the branding precedes the localization process, that is, the brand is already well-

known to the target culture, localization is a lot easier process. If branding and localization are done the same time, the two processes should support a coherent message.

- **intention** – The main purpose of commercial websites is to inform the users about the products put on sale and to close a deal. It is often the case when the localizer has to change the message to reflect production capacity. Global mobile phone manufacturers will first deliver their product to the affluent markets (with the biggest purchasing power), and then, in stages will deliver to all the markets of the world. So, while in the US a product may have a firm product launch date, in Romania the launching date will be just estimative. This will be reflected in the text translated. In the case of web services, there is the advantage of scalability. Web services can be virtually extended to any number of users. Also, there are marketing strategies and pricing policies that may differ from market to market – influenced by cross border taxes, current and predicted exchange rates, etc. For instance, Adobe sells their software at a certain price in the US but for Europe the price is not the equivalent in Euros but numerically identical. The administration part of any commercial website will most likely keep pricing policies separate from the rest of the content.

- **receiver** – The receiver is the most important factor, especially in ecommerce, as his/her response can be traced and thus the message (from the marketing campaign to product specifications, user manual and pricing) can all be changed so that it fits the largest possible range of buyers. The role of the translator and receiver is that of maintenance (Pym, 2010: 4).

- **medium –** The medium in this case is the World Wide Web. As the most complex channel of communication, the major problem with the communication process is that there are many perturbations: links (external – different website or internal – same website), advertisements, animated banners, background sound, etc. In localization, I have already shown that advertising will consider the features of the locale. As for links, there are always links back to the source text, especially in the case of the globally established companies. So, the localizer may need to add in several more links than in the existing website, as an alternative to explicitation, for instance.

- **time** – This is rather an irrelevant factor in case of commercial websites as shown previously. Drawn back products from manufacturing will no longer be on sale; hence no text about them is needed either.

- **place –** The same as with **time**, because of the **medium**, this is a factor that does not influence how the text is received. Visiting a website is not linked to time and space and user can return as often as needed.

- **motive** – The motive of any commercial website is to make sales. Website visitors are aware of the motive and this is not a factor of great influence in understanding the message.

Next, I take a closer look at the intratextual factors:

"Intratextual factors are analysed by enquiring about the subject matter the text deals with (on what subject matter?), the information or content presented in the text (what?), the knowledge presuppositions made by the author (what not?), the composition or construction of the text (in what order?), the non-linguistic or paralinguistic elements accompanying the text (using which non-verbal elements?), the lexical characteristics (in which words?) and

syntactic structures (in what kind of sentences?) found in the text, and the suprasegmental features of intonation and prosody (in which tone?)."(Nord, 2005: 42)

- **the subject matter –** in web commerce it generally refers to a category of products on sale (laptops, tablets, etc) or to a brand (meaning all types of products manufactured under a particular brand)

- **the information –** the exact textual content about a product or service and about how it can be purchased

- **presuppositions –** assumption made or not by the author. For example, new features of a product cannot be presupposed, and probably need lengthy verbalization. Or visitors to the website can be attracted by "what not?" is found on sale. It is a good way of turning around a potential buyer's mind. The user might be looking for "cheap cell phones". Still, the larger co-text of the verbal text may be "… avoid cheap cell phones". This does fault Grice's maxims but a marketer knows that the most important thing is to bring the visitor to the "shop". Good and convincing content may turn the potential buyer into a returning customer.

- **non-verbal elements**:

o **punctuation:** is used to show various suprasegmental units from oral discourse transferred in writing. They can be used to make co-text clearer or add extra meaning – "for(e)thought". Punctuation is culturally specific. For instance, in Hungarian, in a letter, the usage of the exclamation mark after the opening of the letter is normal (Tanár Úr! – Professor!), in English and Romanian it is not acceptable, as comma is used. The exclamation mark indicates a false change of the asymmetric relationship between the sender and the receiver of the communication.

o **font formatting:** usage of capital and lowercase letters, different font colour, different font sizes

o **layout:** block style or indented style, alignment of text, text spacing, usage of lists

- **lexical characteristics –** mostly technical and advertisement related lexical creativity

- **syntactic structures –** specific to informative and operative functions related

- **suprasegmental features –** for instance, font style(bold, italics, underlined) can be used to stress important ideas**.**

Non-verbal or non-text refers to both markers within the text (the paralinguisitic component as seen above) and to visual enhancers that are added to the text. They are called supplements (Nord, 2005)

Ecommerce websites use the informational and operative functions of the non-text elements. This translates usually in employing multiple pictures of the product on sale, professional or customer video reviews, animated user-controlled 360 degree view, usage demo illustrations or video, advertisements played on television, etc.

The localizer will have to translate texts on pictures but also the videos and prepare the target text either for dubbing or for subtitling. Or the localizer might want to invite a customer from the target language to test and review the product.

Non-verbal elements on websites can be a challenge, especially where the appellative or operative function of the language is used. The informative function, in the case of commercial websites, will not cause any problems to the translator/localizer as long as he/she is familiar with the technical vocabulary employed both in the source language and in the target language.

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